STREET SPIRIT

Volume 10, No. 2 February 2004 $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

They Have a Dream to Save the Safety Net



Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts would decimate the safety net at a time when homelessness is on the rise all across California.

All photos by Lydia Gans



At the St. Mary's rally, tables had only a plate of bread crumbs and a glass of water, since the governor's budget would mean a diet of bread and water for the poor.

The governor's proposed cuts are "a violent and lethal attack on the most vulnerable in our community. It is nothing short of a preemptive strike in what has been a covert war on the poor."

— Carol Johnson, St. Mary's Center



Nearly 200 speakers and participants rallied at St. Mary's Center in Oakland to oppose Schwarzenegger's proposed cuts.

by Lydia Gans

Martin Luther King's birthday was observed in many different ways in California on January 15. His words were recited, his dream was vividly recalled. Here in Oakland and in Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno, and Los Angeles, groups of concerned people devoted the day to creating a new emergency alliance, the Save the Safety Net Coalition.

The groups held press conferences and gatherings to warn of the devastating effects that Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts would have on many vital social programs in the state. The Sacramento group also brought their informational packet to Schwarzenegger's office. One might hope that the governor will see fit to read it. Organizers of the Sacramento event indicated that this was the first in what will be continued actions throughout the state to pressure the legislature to prevent the implementation of the governor's proposed cuts.

The gathering at St. Mary's Center in Oakland was more than a press conference. Nearly 200 people, both as individuals and representatives of organizations, committed themselves to forming what Martin Luther King would have called a coalition of conscience.

In opening the meeting, Carol Johnson, executive director of St. Mary's, said, "Our dream and our intention is to capture the attention of our governor and our legislators and change the state's agenda."

Johnson was eloquent in her analysis and her condemnation of the human costs of the governor's proposed budget cuts, along with his promise of no new taxes.

"It must be seen for what it is," she said. "It invites us in our fears of scarcity, in our fears of terrorism, to join into a chant of greed and self-centered thinking, and tries to keep us blind of the consequences."

Johnson said that Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts are "a violent and lethal attack on the most vulnerable in our community. It is nothing short of a preemptive strike in what has been a covert war on the poor."

The speakers at the various conferences all represented programs that provide a broad variety of valuable services to people who are at a disadvantage in our society for any number of reasons — they are poor or disabled, too old or too young, or part of a group outside the mainstream.

At St. Mary's Center, we heard from Kordnie Lee, representing the California Youth Connection, a foster care advocacy organization. She described the trauma suffered by many children in the foster care system, and how many have health problems. Receiving little in the way of guidance or encouragement, 50 percent of those in foster care don't finish high school. The governor's budget proposes to cut mental health services to these young people.

When they leave foster care at 18, she pointed out that 65 percent of them have no place to stay. "They're homeless," Lee said. "And cutting the current housing programs will limit how foster youth can get funding development for transitional housing."

The need for more, not less, help for youth in foster care is clear. Studies have shown, she said, "that 60 percent of San Quentin's prison population dealt with the foster care system in some way."

See **They Have A Dream** *page 18*

After Robert Frost's *Acquainted with the Night*

by Claire J. Baker

I am one of many thousands
acquainted with long nights,
cold sidewalks, gutters, alleys;

acquainted with averted glances,
polished avoidance, guilt-edged
silence from passersby.

I've walked out in rain, not far
enough to escape; have stood still,
listened hard for kindness, a rescue.

The city of my nightmares is
callously clever at calling me
garbage, menace, animal, alien.

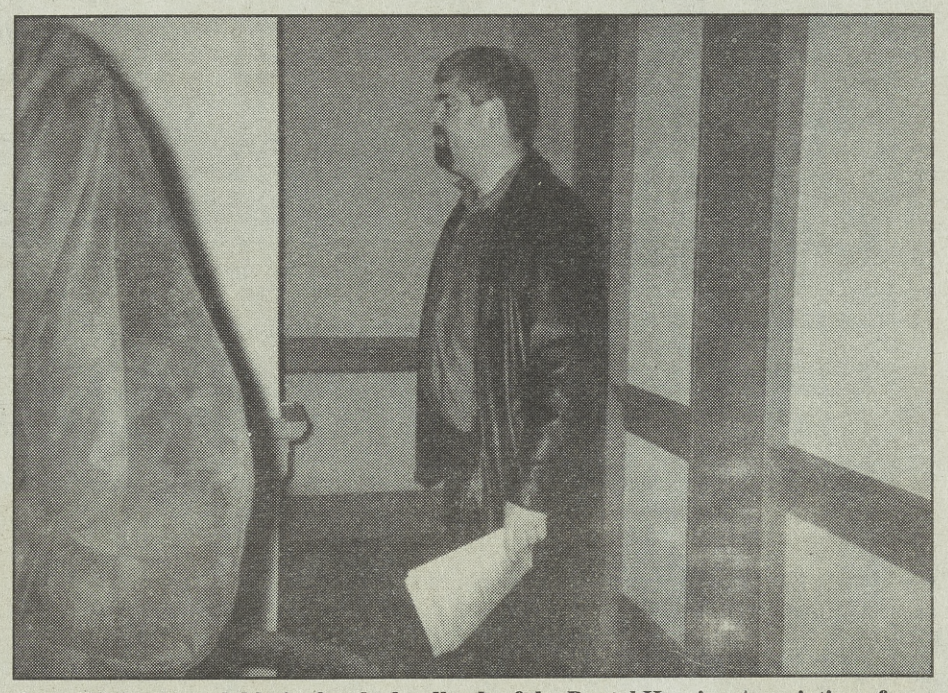
Wrong or right, I die
under the open sky, with or without
Frost's timely moon & stunning stars.

Setback for Real Estate Profiteers in Oakland

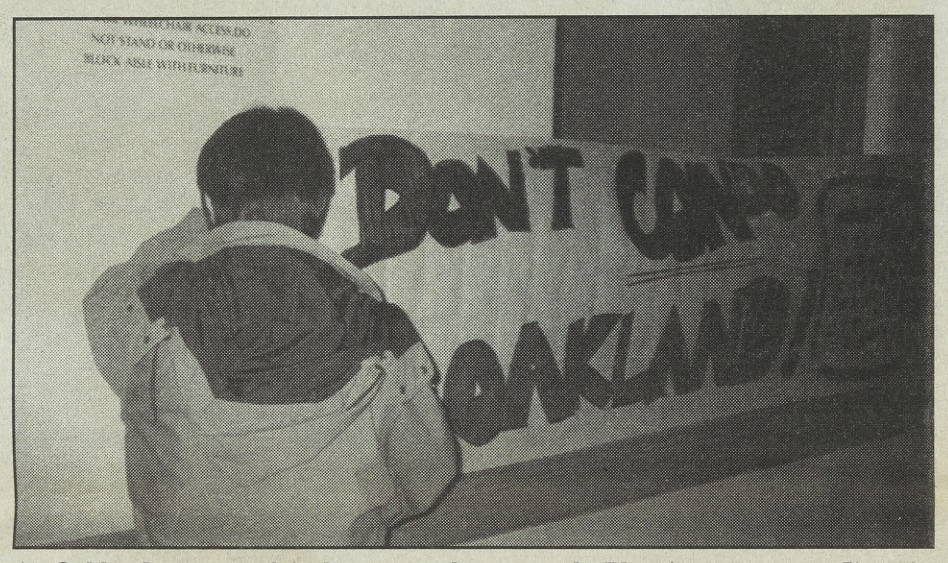
Oakland Planning Commission Delays Condo-Conversion Deregulation



Bielle Moore, a lobbyist for the Oakland Association of Realtors, shies away from the camera at a public meeting of the Planning Commission. Behind the scenes, realtors and landlords are using their enormous influence over Oakland officials to push through a scheme to deregulate condo conversion and gut rent control.



Steve Edrington, a lobbyist for the landlords of the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County, was the lone speaker in favor of deregulating condo-conversions. Edrington called the security cops to try to prevent reporter Lynda Carson from taking his photograph at the public meeting of the Planning Commission.



An Oakland tenant activist hangs up a banner at the Planning Commission meeting declaring: "Don't Condo Oakland."

Photos by Lynda Carson

by Lynda Carson

With a 12-foot-long banner stating "Don't Condo Oakland" stretched across the front window of Hearing Room 1 in Oakland City Hall on January 7, voters, renters and activists successfully united in opposition to City Councilmember Desley Brooks' efforts to take back renter protections in Oakland.

The scheme to deregulate Oakland's 20-year-old condo-conversion laws ran into a stiff wall of opposition as all seven Planning Commissioners unanimously sent the City of Oakland's staff recommendations back to the Special Projects Committee for reconsideration. Oakland city officials failed in their efforts to influence the Planning Commission to vote for an amendment that would have made Measure EE (Just Cause eviction protections) and rent control impossible to enforce in rental units being targeted for condo-conversions.

For more than 20 years, Oakland's condo-conversion laws have restricted rental units from being converted into condominiums unless they are replaced by new rental units. The ordinance has preserved Oakland's rental housing supply and has protected tenants from mass expulsion from their rental units. Condominiums are exempt from rent control, and the rush to deregulate Oakland's condo-conversion laws would result in the loss of renter protections in all rental units being targeted for condo-conversions.

The major change being proposed to the existing ordinance is the elimination of the requirement for landlords to have conversion rights before the condo-conversions are allowed to take place. Since the early 1980s, conversions were restricted until the landlords could obtain conversion rights for rental units being converted into condominiums.

The amendment to deregulate the condo-conversion ordinance seeks to end limitations on conversions in the designated impact areas, and to end the requirement to replace the units being converted into condominiums with new rental units. This would create a giant loophole enabling landlords to get around rent control and the eviction protections of the voter-approved Measure EE, and would reduce the rental housing supply and drive up the costs of rental units even further.

Even more disturbing to the critics are the lack of requirements in the proposed amendment to clearly define when a conversion actually takes place or how long the conversion process can go on before the landlord decides to pull out of the conversion process or complete it.

The staff report defines a conversion as occurring when tenants are served notice by the landlord of intent to convert the rental unit into a condominium, stock cooperative project, or a community apartment project, regardless of whether substantial improvements have been made to the properties or whether the building was removed from the rental market pursuant to the Ellis Act.

During a call on January 21 to Jackie Campbell of Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA), she stated, in contrast to what is written in the staff report/amendment, "We have had discussions about what would define a conversion, and I believe that it (conversion) occurs at the end of the whole process being defined by the City of Oakland."

That is not what is written in the staff report, I replied. When I asked Campbell what the time limit was for condo-conversions to take place from start to finish, she said, "There is no limit on the conversion process from start to finish and, from what I have been told, some conversions may take years before they are completed."

In addition to the lack of requirements to define how long a conversion process may take place before a landlord finishes the project or decides to drop it, landlords do not have to prove to the renters that the conversions taking place are actually consistent with the conversion requirements in state or local laws.

Wide open to abuse

The whole process being promoted is wide open to abuse by any or all unscrupulous landlords who may want to use the conversion process as a means to harass renters out of their rental units — whether a conversion occurs or not.

Critics also argue that this new process being set up by Oakland officials is an attempt to force renters into subsidizing condo-conversions for the landlords while the conversion process takes place.

Under existing state law, landlords generally evict whole buildings at a time under the Ellis Act before conversions take place; and therefore, landlords lose the rental income from those properties while the conversion process takes place as they upgrade the units. But now, the profiteers have convinced Oakland officials to come up with this new scheme to make renters pay for condo-conversions while they're taking place so that the landlords can make money during the conversion process — whether they actually reach completion or not.

City staff are pushing the deal

The condo-conversion scheme was already in full swing by the time of the Planning Commission meeting on January 7, and was next scheduled for a vote by CEDA before heading to a vote by the full City Council in the near future.

The staff report and amendment proposed before the Planning Commission to deregulate Oakland's condo-conversion ordinance, reads like a political directive by the City of Oakland, advising the renters that they are at risk of losing their rental housing if they refuse to cooperate with the scheme to coerce them into buying the units they have been residing in; and that they will be used to subsidize the landlords while the conversion process takes place if they choose to remain in the affected properties.

Oakland is notorious for having old, run-down, rental housing units that have not been brought up to code. Through the years, the newspapers have been full of stories about at-risk renters living in slum-like conditions across the city. The amendment being proposed offers few requirements or incentives for landlords to upgrade the buildings before they are to be offered as condo-conversions, and this has alarmed the community at large.

A group of voters, tenants and organizations opposed to the deregulation of the condo-conversion laws was organized by the Oakland Tenants Union (OTU) and Just Cause Oakland (JCO). At least 30 speakers signed up and passionately spoke out on January 7 at the Planning Commission in opposition to the deregulation scheme in order to save the protections offered by rent control and Measure EE.

Steve Edrington, a lobbyist for the landlords of the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County, was the lone speaker in favor of the amendment for unlimited condo-conversions. All the other speakers were opposed, and warned that deregulation may result in the eviction of thousands if it is passed by the council.

By the time all the speakers made their case against the deregulation proposal, it was apparent that many questions were not addressed by the staff report presented to the Planning Commission. The commissioners were not even certain as to why a vote was about to take place to deregulate Oakland's 20-year-old condo-conversion laws that have successfully protected the city's rental housing supply and thousands of renters from the eviction-for-profit system.

What was clear was that the landlords favored deregulation and the greater community opposed it. But there was little or

See **Setback for Real Estate Lobby** *page 18*

We Have Foxes

by Holman Monell

Foxes have holes to sleep in
but upside down or sideways
not on the slats of a bench built
for bus riders mostly wide awake,
that's Christ in the gray sleeping bag,
legs crooked, brown beard tucked
under a slim slumbering chin,
bereft, ignored, passed by,
nor hath a home, not here, not now.

The Real State Of The Union:

Near Record Unemployment, Misguided Foreign Policy and Domestic Suffering

Editorial by Janis D. Shields, American Friends Service Committee



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Far from the rosy picture painted by President Bush in his State of the Union address, the current state of the union is marked by almost unparalleled unemployment, a multibillion-dollar deficit, millions of people without health insurance or affordable housing, a misguided foreign policy and arguably the worst assaults to our constitution in history. In his speech, Mr. Bush glosses over the human suffering his foreign and domestic policies have created.

True national security is economic security. Government must play an essential role in helping meet the need for affordable housing, quality childcare, well-funded public education, and strong safety-net programs such as TANF (welfare).

To address growing inequality and economic divisions in our country, we must raise the minimum wage, repeal the tax cuts for the wealthiest families, and enact trade policies that value workers over excess corporate profits. Americans need health coverage, jobs with decent wages, and good educational opportunities, if our nation is to keep its people safe and out of harm's way.

Today, over 8.7 million Americans are unemployed, including almost two million who have been unemployed for more than six months. More than 90,000 laid-off workers have lost their federal benefits every week since December 21, when Congress failed to extend long-term unemployment insurance.

America has lost 2.7 million jobs since March 2001. The "jobless recovery" since the recession officially ended in November 2001 has made for the worst hiring slump since the Great Depression.

The tax cuts enacted last year — which the Administration wants to make permanent — will rob the U.S. treasury of $1.7 trillion over 10 years. Although Bush promised that these cuts would help the economy grow by 305,000 jobs a month, only a fraction of those jobs have actually surfaced. In fact, our economy grew by only 1,000 new jobs during the entire month of December, compared to about 1,000 jobs every three hours during the Clinton years.

These cuts have led to $260 billion in lost revenue last year, at a time when more and more Americans can't afford the basic necessities of life, such as food, utilities, housing, and health care, and the states are facing their worst fiscal crisis in 50 years. U.S. trade policies have led to a hemorrhaging of jobs — not just in manufacturing, but high-tech and service jobs as well.

This year, the United States launched a pre-emptive and illegal invasion of Iraq, conducted with little support from the international community and justified by the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction, the existence of which has yet to be verified. The occupation has led to increased violence and delayed the emergence of self-governance.

We parlayed a war on terror into a war against our constitution, robbing decent and hardworking Americans of their civil rights and civil liberties under the PATRIOT Act. Our reckless foreign policy turned the outpouring of goodwill and support of people around the globe after the tragedy of 9/11 to widespread anger and animosity, even among our traditional allies.

President Bush's emotional imagery exploits a culture of fear and creates an economy fueled by a perpetual multibillion-dollar war. In November, in spite of deep domestic budget cuts, national deficits, and unmet needs at home, the U.S. Congress authorized $87 billion for military operations and reconstruction efforts in Iraq. This was the largest special request for money in the history of the United States. Yet, the $21 billion it provided for reconstruction is only a fraction of what will be needed. The end is not in sight.

Last year, the U.S. defense budget was more than the combined military budgets of the next dozen nations. Next year, our military spending will increase to over $400 billion dollars. Our military budget continues to grow, while domestic programs must beg for money.

Instead of no child left behind in educational opportunities, our schools have become another recruitment tool for the big guns in the military. Critical educational programs are not adequately funded and may be slashed in the wake of billions of dollars in projected deficits.

And the casualties of the war and occupation continue to mount. More than 500 U.S. soldiers and thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed since the invasion. Thousands of soldiers were wounded in combat, many suffering severe and debilitating injuries. Some of these soldiers will no longer be employable, either by the military they placed their trust in, or the civilian job market they left behind. Many will be eligible only for discretionary disability pay from their service branch and, perhaps, Social Security benefits due to their inability to work civilian jobs.

The immediate economic impact on the families of these soldiers could have long-reaching effects. Because of ongoing operations in Iraq, the Army, for example, has prevented the retirement and scheduled discharges of more than 40,000 soldiers, proving harmful to the economic security of many reservists and their families and resulting in the loss of businesses, jobs and livelihoods.

Record numbers of people around the globe took to the streets in protests not only against the Iraq invasion, but also to oppose a foreign policy that rejects the counsel of close allies in favor of unilateral military action. America will not win the war on terror by playing bully to the rest of the world. We cannot ease our own suffering by lavishing destruction on other nations, cultures or people.

Securing the homeland means securing the right of ordinary people to jobs, a living wage and the basic necessities of life, including food, utilities, housing, and health care. We can't saddle mind-boggling debt on future generations, or use the middle class and the poor to finance tax breaks for the wealthy.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an internationally recognized Quaker humanitarian service organization, is uniquely qualified to speak concerning U.S. domestic policy and ongoing efforts in war-torn Iraq. The AFSC, in its historic role of mending lives shattered by World Wars I and II, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947, along with the British Friends Service Council, on behalf of all Quakers, for peace building and humanitarian service. AFSC's quick reaction to the internment of Japanese Americans at the beginning of World War II, helped aid, educate and relocate thousands of innocent American citizens who were unfairly targeted, corralled and warehoused because of race.

The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. With national headquarters in Philadelphia and *regional offices in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Des Moines, New York City,* Pasadena, San Francisco, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Seattle, the AFSC works for peace, justice and reconciliation in 22 countries of the world.

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Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency).**

Editor, Layout, Design: Terry Messman

Contributors: Claire J. Baker, Sue Bergman, Bill Berkowitz, Jack Bragen, Lynda Carson, Lynda Cobden, Cathy Cohen, C.R. Credit, Michael Creedon, Randy Fingland, Leonard Roy Frank, Nancy Friedman, Lydia Gans, Christine Hanlon, Charlene Harris, Maureen Hartmann, Carol Harvey, Art Hazelwood, Rebecca Holder, Becky Johnson, Teresa Kennet, Kaethe Kollwitz, Dong Lin, Rosalie Maggio, Daniel Marlin, Holman Monell, Christa Occhiogrosso, Mary Rudge, Husayn Sayfuddiyn, Carolyn Scarr, Janis Shields, Holly Sklar, Robert Terrell

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A wide variety of individuals and organizations report on the issues of poverty and homelessness in Street Spirit. The views expressed in these articles and commentaries are those of the individual authors alone, and not necessarily that of American Friends Service Committee.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art.

Address: **Terry Messman, Street Spirit**
1515 Webster St., Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
Phone: **(510) 238-8080, ext. 303**
E-mail: **spirit@afsc.org**

Angela Alioto Reveals Her Plan to Reduce Homelessness

Alioto declares that Matrix approaches that criminalize homeless people are over. And she believes Newsom will fulfill his promise to give her real power to successfully address homelessness and public power.

by Carol Harvey

I was seated with Angela Alioto, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's new partner on the issues of homelessness, public power, and competitive contracts, in her home at her dark wooden banquet table. We were regarded by a 450-year-old statue of St. Francis her mother obtained in Mexico, standing on an urn in a bay window overlooking the water. "*Pax Et Bonum*," was inscribed above the circular niche in which it stood. Hand-painted purple-and-blue trompe l'oeil simulations of St. Francis' basilica covered the walls.

In her home setting, Angela seemed thoroughly Italian. Her four-year-old granddaughter, Chiara Mia, dressed in pink ballet leotards, ran into the room and climbed on her lap. "Chiara Mia" ("light of my life") danced in and out of our 90-minute interview. Named after a follower of St. Francis, Santa Chiara, for whom a pink-and-yellow-stoned church was built in Assisi, pink-clad Chiara echoed Angela Alioto's childlike enthusiasm, spirit, and ingenuous determination.

During the recent mayoral debates, Alioto's husky voice, rapid-fire delivery, and quirky humor riveted audiences. Up close, she was pretty and feminine, thick lashes softening dark, intense eyes, auburn hair curling around the contours of regal cheekbones.

Alioto explained that, after my earlier article in *Street Spirit* identified her as a member of the Franciscan Order, she got comments that "St. Francis told me to run for mayor," which made her laugh.

We briefly discussed the Oprah Winfrey special on impoverished African children — a six-year-old caring for a four-year-old sibling, with "the mother dead in the bed" from AIDS, and "no government offering help."

I noted her empathy for homeless people lying on sidewalk grates, whereas many walk past, no longer seeing. "It's physically painful to me," Alioto said.

She had spent the previous day with Philip Mongano, Bush's new homeless czar, executive director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness. "He is also Franciscan," she said of Mongano. "He saw a movie about St. Francis in the mid-'70s, gave up everything he was doing in the TV industry, moved to Boston, started doing homeless shelters, then moved into supportive housing and permanent housing."

In the meeting with Mongano, Gavin Newsom told all the department heads, "Angela is here in my place. You are to answer all the questions she has. You are to work with her."

Mongano then told the department heads, "San Francisco has the best programs and services for supportive housing, and the irony is San Francisco has the worst homeless population."

Alioto continued describing the meeting. "He said, 'Now that there is political will from the mayor' — and then he pointed to me, and to all of the department heads — 'there is no doubt in my mind we can end this problem in San Francisco.' He was forceful!"

"I'm shocked that Bush appointed him, but he's wonderful," Alioto said.



Angela Alioto holds a poster of the famed intersection of Haight and Ashbury.

Alioto recounted another very important declaration made by Mongano: "You need to focus more on housing and less on services. You are service-heavy."

'It's an absolute passion'

Later, in private, Alioto told Mongano: "I made this partnership with Gavin where I'm going to be dealing with homelessness. It's a Franciscan problem. It's an absolute passion. It's a mission to me. It's not a job. Over Christmas, I took eight people off the street. I have never met a homeless person in 15 years that wouldn't leave the street with me. Do you know what he said? He said, 'I haven't either.'"

She referred me to a *Chronicle* article describing Philip Mongano talking to homeless people on the street, something he regularly does. "I'm going to have to kid him that the one homeless guy he stops and converses with is a carpenter. I wonder if he got the symbolism?"

Mongano was in town to work with newly elected Mayor Newsom on the Bush Administration's plan to try to end homelessness in the next 10 years. In a January 2003 speech to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Mongano likened homelessness to the abolitionist movement to end slavery. He told the *Chronicle*, "People said the Abolitionists were crazy, that slavery was too woven into the American fabric to end, but they never gave up, and that's just what will happen to homelessness."

Alioto described department heads high-fiving each other after Mongano's kudos to the City's best programs, but worst homelessness population. But Alioto had a different reaction, saying, "If we are doing the programs right, and the result is more homelessness, we are spending the money internally," instead of spending city funds on replicating the high-performance model programs.

Alioto said absolutely every candidate, including Newsom, who was endorsed, supported, and a protégé of Willie Brown, confirmed that "there is no question there's corruption."

She explained, "To have a stranger from out of town say to all these department heads, 'You've got the greatest programs, and the most homelessness' — in my opinion, he wasn't patting anybody on the back. He was saying, 'Something is wrong in Denmark.'"

After scrutinizing sole-source contracts in detail, Newsom gave her boxfuls of them to look over. Alioto said she is Newsom's "partner" in three areas: homelessness, public power, and competitive contracts, meaning, contracts that went out without a competitive bid, based on sole-source exemption.

She bet she couldn't get explanations from different departments as to why they got into particular contracts. "Let's say there's a $50 million contract to house 200 people at this one place," she said. "Why would you enter into this contract for that amount of money for this few people?"

Many questions remain to be asked about such contracts: How many competing bids were submitted? What were those bids? Were they better or worse? Out of many sources, what makes a particular bid a sole source?

Clearly, she plans to research competitive bids to save the "internal waste" that leads to increased homelessness despite San Francisco's model homeless programs.

Alioto was anxious to find immediate solutions. "Everyone talks about homelessness. 'We're going to do this, we're going to do that in six months.' What about tonight?"

She described a 62-year-old mother, a heroin addict she met at Taraval and 38th, who told her, "I went in to Tom Waddell Clinic, and they told me, 'Come back next Tuesday.' Well, to me next Tuesday is a year away," Alioto said. "You can't tell people like that to come back. You grab them the minute they say, 'I'm willing to change.'"

In her outreach to eight people over Christmas, she cited Swords to Plowshares, and called St. Anthony's "a godsend — no pun intended," a fine facility deserving of more funding. She insisted that getting people off the street is easy. If funding for slots was available, "I could do ten a day."

In the Newsom administration, Alioto believes she will be able to implement her homeless program, San Francisco Cares. She reported that Mongano seemed interested in her intake concept of a thousand San Francisco Care Corps who get people off the street "two by two."

Mongano had mentioned four or five people — "everyone from a shrink to a social worker" — going in a group. Alioto was curious why he thought so many people were needed to pick up one person.

"You're back to the internal problem of money," she said. "C'mon, how many people are you going to pick up off the street without it costing too much? Why not have the therapist, the shrink, and the firefighter at the triage center, so they see many, and not just the one picked up by

See **Alioto's Homeless Plans** *page 17*

Sestina to the Homeless People

by Maureen Hartmann

O the tough reality of homelessness!
O the inner and outer chaos!
O the harassment from the law — a living Hell!
O not having a room for intimate relationships — the loneliness!
O the dull ache of hunger!
O the ailments from cold!

O the discovery that society is cold!
O the circumstances that lead to homelessness!
O the rage brought on by the suffering of hunger!
O the everyday life of nothingness and chaos!
O the pain of constant loneliness!
O the clutches of Hell!

O the alienation from normalcy!
O in winter, the bone-chilling cold!
O the desire to sleep that comes from loneliness!
O the agony, not having a bed, that goes with homelessness!
O having to accept kindness from strangers — the chaos!
O the lack of food for thought that leads to inner hunger!

O the forced fasts that result in extreme hunger!
O what one has to do for survival — it's Hell!
O the verbal and physical abuse of panhandlers — the fear!
O the physical agony of hunger and cold!
O the humiliation of homelessness!
O the constant loneliness!

O the stench that results in social loneliness!
O the continual presence of hunger!
O the cutbacks of Care Not Cash to the homeless!
O the prospect of having one's check sliced — the Hell!
O the inner and outer bitter cold!
O the San Francisco political chaos!

O the legislation that feeds the lives of the homeless to chaos!
O the homeless, jobless, friendless life that leads to loneliness!
O the fear of strangers in shelters that leads one to stay out in the cold!
O the waits in soup kitchens, that bring hunger!
O the losses of property due to confiscation by the law — Hell!
O the dues in life that are paid by the homeless!

O the cold, O the chaos!
O the homelessness, loneliness!
O the hunger, O the Hell!

A Cure for the Health Care Crisis

Senate Bill 921 would provide universal coverage for all Californians from cradle to grave, regardless of their work status or income.

by Sue Bergman

Not a day goes by that there isn't some mention in the media about our failing health care system. Currently, the United States is in the middle of a health care meltdown characterized by soaring costs, increasing numbers of uninsured people, and inadequate care.

We truly are in a health care crisis that is threatening the overall well-being of the nation and creating daily tragedies for millions of people. It is difficult to predict what will happen if we continue in this manner, without fundamental change to the entire system. There is hope in California, though, if Senate Bill 921, the Health Care for All Californians Act, is passed by the state legislature.

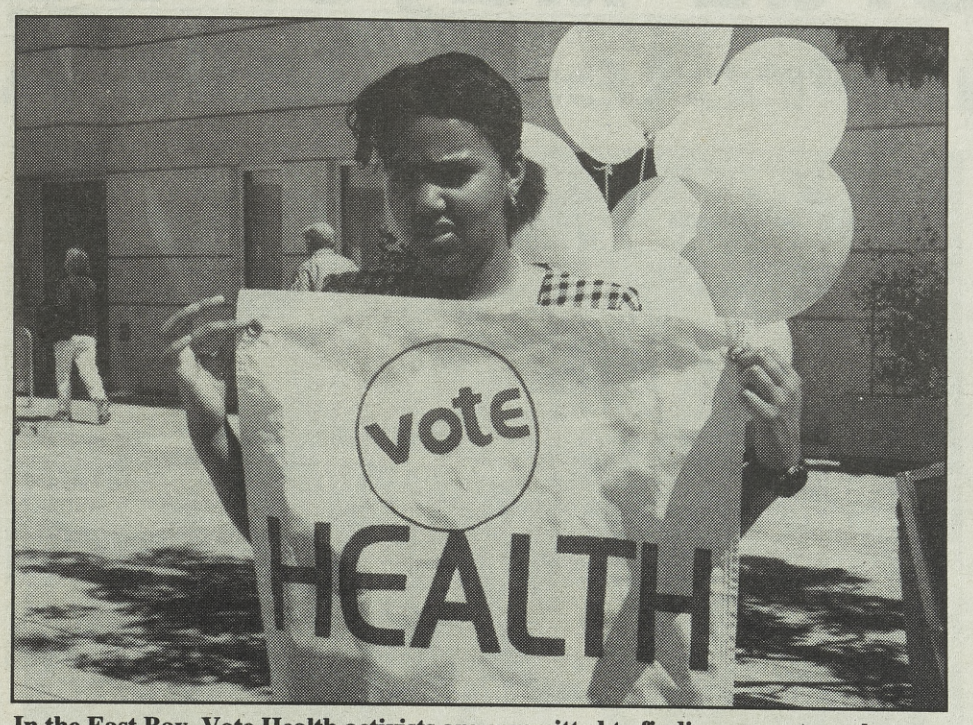
In much the same way that a doctor would evaluate and treat an illness, it is imperative that we: 1) Identify the symptoms of our current, failed system; 2) understand why these ills have arisen in the system (the underlying diagnosis); and, 3) develop a treatment plan and cure.

It is past time for us to directly address these topics and provide a positive and equitable solution to this bureaucratic mess we call our health care system.

The Symptoms

Currently, there are more than 44 million people in the United States who have no health care insurance. In California alone, nearly 7 million people lack coverage. These numbers are increasing daily as more and more people are joining the ranks of the unemployed and employers are reducing or withdrawing coverage from employees. It is conservatively estimated that 18,000 people die every year as a direct result of not having health insurance.

Health care costs and premiums are soaring at a rapid rate, making personal bankruptcy an all-too-common phenomenon.



In the East Bay, Vote Health activists are committed to finding a way to make health care accessible and affordable to all — a universal, single payer system.

The market-driven system relies heavily on profit-making to survive, and not on human need. Private insurance companies make medical decisions based on the profit motive, rather than on sound medical judgment.

Health care spending in the United States is greater than any other country in the world — over $6,000 per person.

Our health care outcomes are the worst in the developed world, ranking 37th.

Between 25-35 percent of every health care dollar is diverted from direct medical care, to cover the high cost of administration, executive salaries, and profits.

Hospital closures, consolidations, and decrease in services occur every day.

Inadequate and inappropriate care is becoming the norm, even for those with coverage.

The Diagnosis

Simply put, the reasons for the current ills in our health care system stem from the convoluted premise upon which our medical system is based: That health care is a privilege and not a human right, i.e., if you can't afford it, you don't deserve it. Every other developed country in the world provides universal health care coverage as a basic human right.

We have a market-driven system which relies heavily on profit-making to survive, and not on human need. Private insurance companies make medical decisions based on the profit motive, rather than on sound medical judgment. The financial bottom line is their first concern.

Our system is based on an employer model, where most people who do have coverage have it as a job benefit. If you lose your job, you lose your coverage. Or, you have a job and get no medical coverage from your employer but you can't afford to pay for insurance yourself. Nearly 85 percent of the uninsured have jobs.

The Cure

Activists committed to finding a way to make health care accessible and affordable to all residents have crafted a solution to this disarray — a universal, single payer system as proposed by Senate Bill 921, now in the California Legislature. The bill provides universal coverage for all Californians from cradle to grave, regardless of their work status, income, and legal status.

Everyone would have the same comprehensive benefit package, including prescription drugs, hospital and doctor services, laboratory services, health education, and all other health services provided by licensed practitioners without co-payments or other fees. Health care decisions would be made by combining evidence-based medicine and patient need.

Prescription drug prices would be negotiated at lower rates due to the strong purchasing power of the state, consisting of the total population.

All of this is possible without costing a cent more than what is currently being spent on health care. The dollars are being spent already; they would just be spent differently. The financing of this system would come from all existing sources of health care revenue (Medicare, Medi-Cal, and other governmental sources), plus an employer payroll tax, and a progressive income tax.

The costs of employers who are now providing benefits for their workers would significantly decrease. For the tax-paying public, the average person would pay $500 to $1500 less than they currently pay in premiums, co-pays, and other out-of-pocket medical expenses.

Private insurance companies would become a thing of the past because the single payer plan would be cheaper, more comprehensive, and simpler than any currently offered plan. There would not be a need for the tremendous amounts of paperwork and administrative costs that now soak up so much of each health care dollar.

Single payer refers to one fund, needing only one claim form. There are currently over 10,000 health plans, each with their own forms and restrictions. Such simplicity would save billions of dollars that can be better spent on direct medical care. This bill would bring true health care justice to the State of California.

To learn more about this monumental piece of legislation, visit Health Care for All-California's website, www.healthcareforall.org, for more information about the bill and how you can help. East Bay advocacy work on this important piece of legislation is being led by Vote Health, an affiliate of Health Care for All-California.

For further information, call Sue Bergman at (510) 540-7085.

Thanks to Nancy Friedman, director of Vote Health, for assistance with this article.

Measure A Could Save Health Care

by Nancy M. Friedman, executive director, Vote Health

The campaign is on to pass a half-cent sales tax for Alameda County residents that will preserve most services offered by the Alameda County Medical Center (ACMC). Supporters are needed to help pass Measure A, the Essential Medical Services Ordinance, which will need a two-thirds vote on March 2.

Victory for Measure A will mean that 75 percent of the anticipated $90-105 million in revenues collected yearly will go directly to ACMC in "new money," meaning it will not replace other funds earmarked for the Medical Center.

The ACMC includes Highland Hospital (including several specialty clinics) and Trauma Center, Fairmont Hospital's Skilled Nursing Facility, Neuro-Respiratory and Acute Rehabilitation Services and HIV Outpatient Clinic, John George Psychiatric Pavilion, and three community health centers: Eastmont Wellness Center in Oakland, Winton Wellness Center in Hayward, and Newark Health Center.

The remaining 25 percent of the revenues will be distributed to community-based clinics and other providers of uncompensated health care, as determined by public input and an appointed oversight committee.

Much of the public isn't aware of the role of the ACMC in providing care to those who are caught in the often tragic dilemma of needing medical attention, but not being able to afford it (and few can, without insurance or government assistance).

People also don't know that closing any of ACMC's services quickly results in longer emergency room waits throughout the county, regardless of economic status. The nationally known Trauma Center should matter to anyone who travels the highways in North County, or is otherwise seriously injured, since its specialty equipment and skilled medical personnel are often the difference between life and death.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Measure A campaign, go to www.MeasureA.org or contact Raymond Ehrlich, the campaign manager, at (415) 775-5505, or raymondehrlich@yahoo.com.

The campaign is being organized by supervisor's districts. Nate Miley has an office in the Eastmont Town Center, near the corner of Bancroft and Church. Keith Carson has set up an office at 2135 Broadway (2 blocks south of Grand). SEIU Local 616's storefront on 17th and Webster is the third site. All have materials and phones for reaching out to voters. In addition to running phone banks most week nights, people are going out on the streets to distribute buttons, bumper stickers, lawn signs and literature every weekend until March 2.

The Governator's Budget Cuts

One of the many painful aspects of Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposals to close the state budget deficit is the proposal to "reform" or "redesign" Medi-Cal. This translates into a reduction of eligibility, enrollment, and benefits, and an increase in cost-sharing, for low-income populations.

In addition, the money taken from cities and counties will force cutbacks in local funding for health care, resulting in more uncompensated emergency room visits and related inpatient care.

Since Alameda County did not give a majority vote to Schwarzenegger, we are less likely to receive bailouts from him. This makes the Measure A campaign to increase funding for local hospitals and clinics even more critical.

Also, the governor is calling for a return to minimum wage for In Home Support Service workers, as well as a narrowing of the definition of who can receive support for working for the disabled and elderly. Advocacy organizations are urging the public to ask Schwarzenegger and state legislators to raise the additional revenues needed to prevent severe health cuts.

For information on organizing on the governor's cuts, go to www.VoteHealth.net, or call Jessica Rothhaar, Organizer for Health Access, at (510) 873-8787, x 107.

to beg, borrow or steal

by Randy Fingland

here's the long & short:
when no coins're
in the pocket
but it's necessary
to purchase something:
that's deficit spending.

if you can't borrow
from the citizen's future
like the government
or pull a plastic card
out of the purse to pay
for an immediate need,
then that's deficit extending,
the practice most prescribed
in the streets.

Santa Cruz Mayor Banishes Peaceful Protest, Jails Activist

by Becky Johnson

On Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz, merchants count receipts from the holiday shopping season, and take inventory. Outside the Pacific Trading Company (PTC), people walk past a fenced-off planter where once guitarists sat and strummed and young folks lounged.

But last June, under pressure from the PTC, the City of Santa Cruz paid several thousand dollars to move the metal railing about eight inches to the outside edge to eliminate seating. Move along, Rosa Parks. You can't sit here anymore.

Inside Borders Books, half a block away, former *Street Spirit* vendor coordinator John Maurer was told he couldn't read there any more because doing so without buying was "basically stealing." Just outside Borders, a new change machine has been installed. Since a City ordinance prohibits sitting on the sidewalk or asking for spare change within 50 feet of such a machine, the City has effectively "cleaned up" the entire storefront area of kids and homeless people who used to gather there. Most had no better place to go. And every night, the cops scope out homeless people in vehicles or outdoors for illegal sleeping, banned from 11 p.m. until 8:30 a.m.

The economy has not been kind to the merchants or to homeless people. Santa Cruz County has experienced a steep rise in homelessness from 2002 to 2003, a jump from 8,558 experiencing homelessness each year to a whopping 11,898 for 2003. Shelters, such as Santa Cruz Homeless Services Center, have had 10 percent cutbacks in their budgets and are *struggling to hold the line providing for* existing services. They cannot expand to meet the increased need.

On January 4, HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) contacted Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy and asked him to place repeal of the sleeping ban and blanket ban on the January 13th City Council agenda.

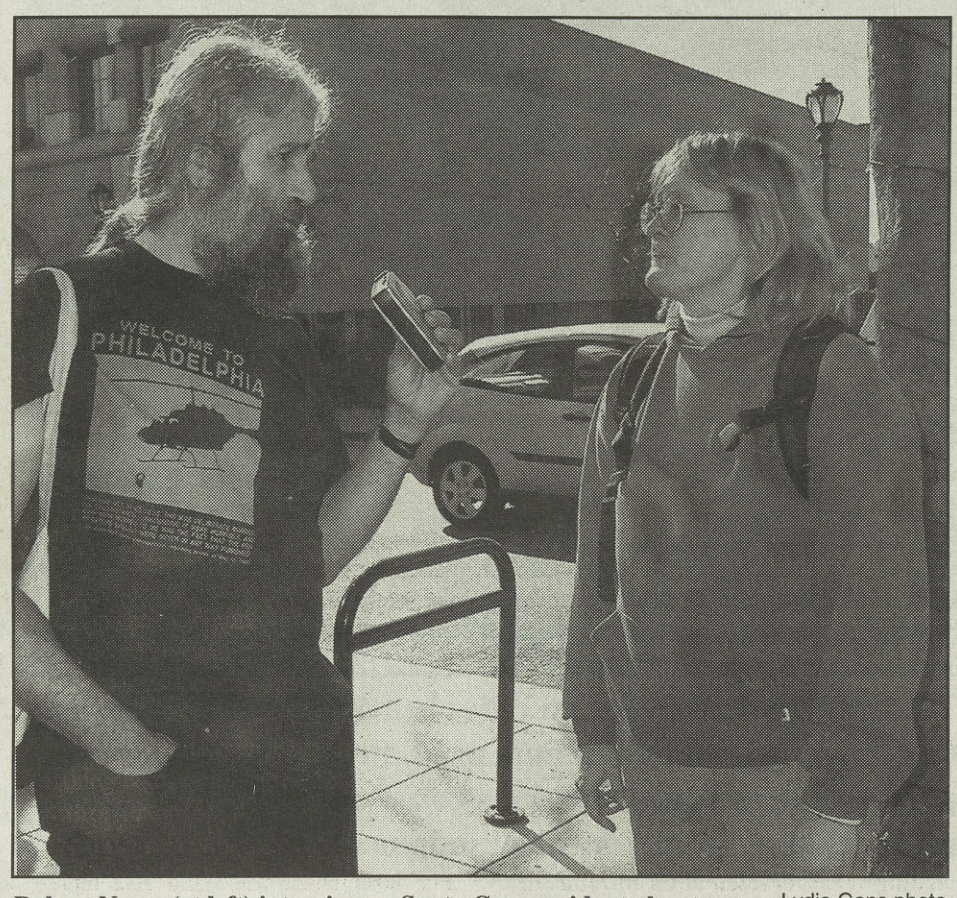
Mayor refuses to help homeless

Mayor Kennedy declined, saying "it [repeal of the Sleeping Ban] might well, in fact, contribute to greater vulnerability and risk." Kennedy added, "I have no reason to believe that repeal of the Sleeping Ban would be supported by a majority of the City Council." How does allowing homeless people to sleep at night and to keep warm with blankets make them more vulnerable? What about their risk of exhaustion and hypothermia?

On January 13, HUFF held a press conference in front of City Hall on the criminalization of homelessness nationwide and the Santa Cruz Sleeping Ban in particular. The ban, passed in 1978 and supported by the mayor and the entire City Council, menaces the physical safety of homeless people and makes them second-class citizens by subjecting them to arbitrary interrogation, detention, search, arrest, and exclusion.

At the same time as the City Council was being confronted with the issue of the Sleeping Ban, Santa Cruz was the host for several out-of-town writers and speakers at the One Dance Conference, and some of these speakers joined local activists in calling for a repeal of the ban.

Conference speakers included social scientist and internationally known writer Michael Parenti, author and editor Mickey Z, and Canadian student activist Yves Engler. Outspoken master chef, Joseph Schultz, provided hot vegan soup for the participants. The Conference took place while Mayor Kennedy's City Council met nearby and was MCed by *Street Spirit* writer Robert Norse. Local speakers included Steve Argue, on trial in February for political tabling for more than one hour, as well as members of the Society for Freedom and Expression [SAFE], street performers who are challenging police harassment policies in federal court. Also present were former Homeless Issues Task Force members Thomas *Leavitt and Linda Lemaster.*



Lydia Gans photo

Robert Norse (at left) interviews a Santa Cruz resident about homeless issues. Norse, an activist and journalist, was ordered arrested by Mayor Kennedy for speaking out against the Sleeping Ban at a City Council meeting.

'Speakers for the Dead'

Leavitt planned to read the names of the 47 homeless and formerly homeless people who died in Santa Cruz last year.

Mayor Kennedy denied the public an accessible oral communications period by putting it at an uncertain time. This forced Leavitt to postpone the planned "Speakers for the Dead Procession." Unable to speak to the councilmembers, the group filed into City Council to silently register their protest. Some carried signs reading "Sleep is not a crime!" "End the Sleeping Ban" and "Shelter requests are up 41% and we are arresting people for Sleeping?"

Kennedy, seeing the signs visible on the television monitor, demanded that sign-holders take them to the side of the room out of view of the televised broadcast, though no one had complained that their view of the council had been blocked. When the oral communications period was not forthcoming, they silently paraded past the City Council and out the door.

Vice-Mayor Mike Rotkin snapped to Kennedy, "You don't have to take that kind of crap, remove them!" Kennedy then interrupted speaking councilmembers to give a general warning that the silent protest was "disruptive." In response, Michael Parenti turned to the mayor and said distinctly, "No, it's not. It's really not."

Gaping at this, Kennedy began a recitation of his interpretation of the City Council "decorum" rules, but before he had gotten very far, the sign carriers had completed their single passage in front of the council and left the room. Neither holding signs nor walking across the council chambers had formerly been a prohibited activity. A HUFF activist added. "We were careful not to cross while people were at the podium; that was the only ruling I knew about."

Some minutes later, Kennedy zeroed in on Norse for merely whispering to Doug McGrath. McGrath, a homeless activist who lives in his van, had worked extensively with the Homeless Issues Task Force several years before. McGrath later explained, "Robert quietly told me a television crew from Channel 46 wanted me outside to talk about how hard it was for us under the Sleeping Ban. There was no way he or I were being disruptive. There were several other louder exchanges going on in the audience. I later told Kennedy that what he had done was selective and discriminatory."

Others agreed that the brief exchange, inaudible on the tape of the City Council session, and quite normal at council meetings, was not disruptive. The whispered exchange, the prior procession, and a "why am I being evicted" question from Norse, became Kennedy's "evidence" that Norse was disruptive. Under threat of expulsion, Norse left, but shortly returned to wait to speak at oral communications.

A blacklist for activists

Kennedy then announced a new policy of "cumulative warnings" tallied from meeting to meeting, as well as a blacklist of nine people who had received warnings at the meeting, although nearly 20 people had crossed the council chambers, some with signs and some without. Kennedy said his decision as chair to eject or arrest a member of the public could be overturned by a majority vote on the council. He then ordered Norse arrested.

When Norse approached the podium to ask for a council vote in response to Kennedy's arrest order, Kennedy directed workers to "turn off the TV and the sound and recess while Mr. Norse is being arrested." As Norse was being forced out of the chamber by police, he asked the council to vote to overturn the mayor's order. "Will no member of the City Council uphold the right that the mayor has stated?"

In the half-hour before Norse's arrest, Kennedy had unleashed a volley of warnings at various members of the audience for such things as "having a sign in the audience," "walking in front of the City Council," "having a sign while walking in front of the City Council," and "conversing in City Council chambers." At one point, Kennedy read the entire Rules of Decorum aloud, which prohibit "making personal, impertinent, or slanderous remarks, or becoming boisterous."

Norse is currently challenging these decorum rules in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals as unconstitutional for giving the mayor too much power to selectively intimidate and remove critics.

On orders from Lt. Steve Clark, Norse was held at the Santa Cruz County Jail for four hours rather than being immediately cited and released — the usual case in a citizen's arrest. He faces a $1000 fine and up to six months in jail if convicted, and promises to subpoena Kennedy and other City Council members to his trial, if the harassment charges are not dropped. He said he believes they will be.

While charged by past mayors with disruption, Norse said he has never been tried, much less convicted, on this charge.

"This removes me from City Council meetings and frightens others from coming," Norse said. "Being arrested for trying to speak at a public meeting is bad enough. Kennedy's Sleeping Ban is even more cruel: It arrests people for doing what they must do — sleep at night. Kennedy co-founded the local Resource Center for Nonviolence and has kind words for Palestinian rights and Bush's political prisoners. But for the homeless and their supporters in Santa Cruz — over whom he has some real power — he wields the Sleeping Ban. For critics at City Council, he piously wraps himself in the flag of decorum rules."

cleverly disguise

by Randy Fingland

the only way to avoid
targethood
is to keep moving —
no laying out
the sleeping bag
under an overpass
when it's raining —
never stretch out
on a park bench
during business hours —
and always keep
the nostrils full of
the air from another
district of our fair city

supporting local merchants

by Randy Fingland

ever notice how
the street pilgrims
are the ones
to patronize the small
(often family-owned & operated)
independent businesses
for daily supplies
rather than large
corporate stores,
which tend not to
welcome
spending-for-survival
shoppers anyway

at the cash grounds

by Randy Fingland

"'milling around,'
Officer Friday,
doesn't do justice
to *chillin' this corner*
into an iceberg calm
with the heart-at-peace
intention of my presence,
but there's no harm
done
if I move my intention on,
either."

Ten Years of Defending the Poor from Evictions

"Absolutely there's a need for the EDC! Anne's really on the frontlines on a daily basis. Talk to anyone in the low-income communities and they may not know where City Hall is, but they all know of the EDC or how to find it." — Andrew Wolff

by Lynda Carson

On Thursday evening, January 22, a small celebration was held to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Eviction Defense Center, a nonprofit agency located in downtown Oakland and dedicated to the Herculean task of protecting renters in the East Bay from unjust evictions.

The Eviction Defense Center (EDC) first opened its doors back in February 1994, just in time to face a rising and seemingly unstoppable flood of evictions-for-profit that began sweeping through Oakland.

The small law firm of attorneys, staff and volunteers mainly serve low-income renters facing eviction from their housing in Oakland and Alameda County. With a staff of 10-12 rotating attorneys to serve the clientele, the EDC has taken on over 10,000 cases in the past seven years, and presently accepts around 1,500 cases per year.

After putting so much hard work into the decade-long struggle to help people keep a roof over their heads, a small group of steadfast volunteers and advocates looked forward to a special evening to celebrate the dedication of Anne Tamiko Omura, the executive director of the EDC for the past seven years, and her hard-working staff. Gina Amato is the staff attorney of the EDC, Kristen Crowley the office manager, and new staff members Erica Garcia and Jorge Aguilar all were on hand to celebrate this important milestone for EDC.

The 10-year celebration for the EDC was also planned as a surprise birthday party for Anne Omura. As the participants anxiously awaited her arrival, some community activists came by to offer support, including James Vann of the Oakland Tenants Union, Adam Gold of Just Cause Oakland, and numerous attorneys from the East Bay Tenants Bar Association.

Soon, warm cheers arose from the group as Anne Omura arrived with her husband, Whitty. Ira Jacobowitz, one of the founders of Eviction Defense Center, excitedly gave a brief history of how the EDC came about. He focused on how committed Anne Omura has been to the cause during her seven years as director.

Attorney John Murcko helped to organize the celebration, and was the one to proudly offer Omura a Community Service Award on behalf of the East Bay Tenants Bar Association, with the inscription: "To Anne Tamiko Omura, Director of the Eviction Defense Center, For Outstanding Representation of Tenants in Alameda and Contra Costa County."

A toast followed and cheers arose as a smiling Anne Omura graciously accepted the service award as she warmly gazed upon the group of friends and co-workers during that precious moment, as they recognized her hard work and commitment in keeping the EDC on track in its defense of those in need. Shortly after, a candle-lit, chocolate birthday cake was brought out and the group again expressed cheers of solidarity with this devoted soul whose caring work means so much to so many.



Anne Omura (in center, holding plaque) is honored for her long years of hard work and commitment in defending East Bay renters from unfair evictions.

Omura said, "I'm grateful for being able to have this position at the EDC and I really love working with so many different people from the community."

In or out of court, the Eviction Defense Center offers free legal advice over the phone, and has a sliding scale fee for those needing legal representation to fend off evictions. The numbers of eviction cases heading into the courts have increased over the years, and the EDC remains very focused on defending low-income renters.

According to an April 2003 newsletter from the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM), 6,264 evictions were filed in Alameda County from 2001 through 2002, with another 3,526 evictions filed in Contra Costa County. According to county statistics, Alameda County has the greatest number of evictions filed annually in Northern California, with Los Angeles County in the southern part of the state being the eviction capital of California.

Making matters worse for poor and displaced tenants being evicted by the thousands, the housing market has shifted from the mom-and-pop landlords to an industry of profiteering racketeers driving up housing costs through market strategy manipulations, the aid of corrupt politicians, and stricter screening methods to cherry-pick among renters in search of the higher-income brackets.

Renters often face discrimination and retaliation, and the never-ending schemes to fleece tenants are varied and numerous.

Some landlords steal their deposits or the interest rates on security deposits. Others charge more than the allowable annual rent increases permit, and then choose to evict if renters speak out about these injustices. Other landlords demand that Section 8 tenants pay more than the contracts require.

Elderly, long-term renters often are tossed out on the streets by the new owner of a building who refuses to acknowledge the fact that the faithful renters living there have paid so much for so long, that by now they should rightfully own the property.

No matter what the latest schemes may be to fleece renters out of their money or force them out of their housing, there comes a time when people need legal representation. That's when the Eviction Defense Center comes in, to help support and defend the abused renters from the ruthless profiteers that have frightened so many families with unjustified and unaffordable rent hikes, retaliation, or ominous eviction notices that can literally ruin the lives of low-income tenants.

For those renters who fail to seek representation to defend themselves from evictions, the Sheriff's Department exists to take care of them in short order. According to the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, evictions are usually completed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week. The fee charged to send over an armed crew to do the dirty work of the landlords is only $75, and an extra $30 is charged if they have to repost an eviction notice at the door of the victims.

Elderly, long-term renters often are tossed out on the streets by the new owner of a building who refuses to acknowledge the fact that the faithful renters living there have paid so much for so long, that by now they should rightfully own the property.

Many tenants have spent sleepless nights in fear of the sheriff's deputies as the clock ticks away the final hours they can remain in their home. With nowhere to go because rents are so high — and because the landlords have just blacklisted them for the next 10 years with unlawful detainers — some renters wait until the last moment to flee the situation, or are still there when the sheriff's deputies arrive to force them out onto the streets.

Oakland renter Joan Cook has resided in the same apartment for over 20 years, and had this to say about Anne Omura and the Eviction Defense Center: "What a difference she's making in the lives of people. She could be getting rich, but instead she helps out the community and helps to keep their lives intact. Without her help, many people could not fight back. This makes a tremendous difference in the lives of people."

Among so many other renters with their own experiences to share about the EDC was Lorraine Key, who has resided in the same place for 37 years. Key said, "Anne Omura and the Eviction Defense Center was there for me when I needed help after a new landlord took over and tried to evict me. They connected me with the Campaign for Renters Rights, and between them all, they were there to come to my rescue and convinced my landlord to leave me alone."

"When we occupied the city attorney's and mayor's offices to protest slumlord Richard Thomas, the lawyers and staff of the EDC were there with picket signs in hand," said Rob Rooke of the Campaign for Renters Rights. "In the fight against the landlords and the forces of privilege in our society, the EDC is a breath of fresh air."

A chorus of other voices testified to the essential work of the EDC. Sandra Miguel said, "I want to say thanks to the EDC because two years ago I was evicted and they helped me a lot. They gave me support and good information about my rights as a tenant. As a result of the help I received through the EDC, I got out of an awful situation and managed to land in a beautiful townhouse with three bedrooms for me and my children."

Former Rent Board Commissioner Andrew Wolff said, "Absolutely there's a need for the EDC! Anne's really on the frontlines on a daily basis, and I know it may sound like a cliché, but it's true. I see people every day being defended by the EDC, or have been in the past. Talk to anyone in the low-income communities and they may not know where City Hall is, but they all know of the EDC or how to find it. If anyone could contribute time or money, the EDC is the organization to join and to help keep going for future generations ahead."

Ebony Bolton told an especially moving story of privation. Bolton said, "Since November 2002, I have lived in the same place run by a landlord that discriminates, was rude and has harassed me. My child had heart surgery, and times were hard. It was a blessing that the EDC came to my aid when they did. It was Christmas time, and the worst time of my life was happening. Somehow the EDC pulled me through it all, and they managed to save my housing and keep a roof over my family."

Meika Johnson, another Oakland tenant, echoed that view. "The EDC was great! They really served me well, and there's nothing I can say to really express my gratitude for what they have done for me. They were with me through the whole eviction process. Anne was great, does her job well and I'm at a loss of words to describe what a wonderful job she did by sticking it out with me all the way."

Local attorney Nikhil Unadkat said, "Homelessness is becoming a significant problem across America and the Bay Area, and is a very big issue in the lives of people. It's creating so much disparity and trauma throughout society. We need the EDC to be there to help out and represent the poor. In addition, the fact that the EDC is an activist organization in the courts is incredible."

Lori Kossowsky said, "The landlords are trying to get rid of rent control and Measure EE because they would evict people in a heartbeat to raise the rents. Without the EDC, where would we go to get help?"

Attorney John Murcko passionately expressed his views. "The EDC has provided excellent defenses in Alameda County for renters against greedy and vicious landlords for the last 10 years," he said. "Anne is the best director of the EDC because she's serious about the class struggle against the landlords. In her ideology she always puts justice and housing rights before other considerations. I can only hope that Anne has many children to carry on the struggle the same way as she does."

The author of this story has also been defended by the EDC on numerous occasions and is forever grateful for the wonderful work they have done to help keep myself and others from becoming homeless upon the cold, lonely streets of Oakland. Thank you Anne, and everyone else that helps out at the EDC!

The Eviction Defense Center may be reached at (510) 452-4541.

America's Covert and Demeaning Caste System

Structures of social dominance: The service rituals of shoeshine 'boys'



The caste system's rituals of dominance and subservience. All photos by Robert Terrell



In New York City, a shoeshine "boy" waits wearily for his next customer.



A shoeshine customer in a position of dominance on Market St. in San Francisco.

By publicly using another human being in such a blatantly oppressive manner, the customer is expressing a primitive urge to assert dominance and assumed superiority. He is in pursuit of the corrupt pleasure associated with having another human being serve him in the manner of a slave.

by Robert Terrell

The income options available to those members of our society with few marketable skills are concentrated in low-prestige occupations. Maids, janitors, gardeners, parking meter attendants, street sweepers and those who wash other people's cars by hand fall into this category. Due primarily to their dangerously low incomes, tens of millions of them cluster near the *lowest rungs of the nation's relatively* rigid caste system.

Located still lower in this American caste system are the nearly anonymous crews of temporary workers who perform tasks such as distributing handbills from door to door, or picking up garbage and trash in generally neglected public spaces such as parks, freeway medians, and the cluttered paths and alleys that snake through lower-class neighborhoods.

Workers who do jobs of this sort may have low prestige in society, but not the lowest. Lower still on the totem pole of employment prestige are those such as the stoic individuals who are paid to slosh dirty mops about in the soiled booths of porn emporiums.

Virtually all low-prestige, lower-caste jobs have highly unpleasant dimensions, and those who must accept them in order to survive frequently struggle mightily with issues associated with dignity, pride and self-worth. Chronic, debilitating drug addiction, unstable living conditions, antisocial violence and numerous other forms of self-destructive behavior are some of the most visible results of their pain and alienation.

Those of us who have the luck and good fortune to earn our daily bread in more prestigious, better-paying jobs, should devote more attention to the individuals trapped in lower-caste jobs. If for no other reason, we should do so because understanding the nature of such jobs, and their frequently destructive impact on the people who perform them, is critical to the maintenance of those aspects of society that used to be recognized as the fabric that holds civilizations together.

There was a time not so long ago when it was possible to believe that, here in the United States, expanding wealth and prosperity were such that the worst low-paying, low-prestige jobs would be eliminated relatively soon. The corollary hope was that, even if such jobs could not be eliminated, slow, steady social progress would ensure that those who had to do them would be provided opportunities to live and work in dignity.

Developments in the United States during the past couple decades have laid most such dreams to rest. Thus, given the mean-spirited, triumphalist, social Darwinist ideologies which inspire the elites who currently dominate public life *in the United States, it seems appropriate* now to conclude that long-suppressed liberal dreams and aspirations regarding the creation of a more just and egalitarian social order will not become manifest reality any time soon.

It seems reasonable to focus on shoeshine "boys" to embellish this point because they provide a good, representative example of the myriad forms of servile obeisance that we in this wealthy, leisure-oriented society require of those confined to the lowest rungs of our caste system. Shoeshine "boys" can also be used to glean important insights regarding the nature of our structurally cruel social order.

For those unfamiliar with the highly ritualized culture of domination and submission that shapes the social and economic experience of shoeshine "boys," it should suffice to provide the following pointers.

Shoeshine "boys" are found in all parts of the United States. They perform their ritualized labor in airports, train stations, malls, country clubs and the men's rooms of elite hotels and restaurants. Those who work the toilet scene at elite establishments are frequently required to do double duty by providing clean hand cloths to customers after they finish using the facilities. Extra tips are commonly provided for this particularly intimate service.

Most commonly, however, shoeshine "boys" perform their service on the streets in business districts frequented by well-off white people.

The first important thing to understand about shoeshine "boys" is that the overwhelming majority of them are people of color, and the vast majority of them are black. My best intuition suggests that racial prejudice has more to do with the continuing presence of black shoeshine "boys" in our society than any other factors. For example, shoeshine "boys" are virtually nonexistent in Europe or Asia. But they are commonly found in the sections of Africa where whites have settled in large numbers.

In any event, the second important thing to understand about shoeshine "boys" is that they are required to be good-natured, and unfailingly subservient. These requirements clearly indicate that the shoeshine "boy" is engaged in a ritual wherein he plays a role, in addition to providing a service.

As far as the customer is concerned, the key point to be understood is that when he procures the services of a shoeshine "boy" he is attempting to purchase something more important than a shoeshine. By engaging in the public ritual of using another human being in such a blatantly oppressive manner, he is expressing a primitive urge to assert dominance and his assumed innate superiority.

In other words, the customer is in pursuit of the corrupt pleasure associated with having another human being serve him, however briefly, in the manner of a slave. For many people in our society, paying for such a service is a form of addiction.

Given this, it should come as no surprise that servility of the sort required from the shoeshine "boy" is imposed, one way of another, on virtually everyone relegated to the lowest rungs of the national caste system.

Shoeshine "boys" who understand these complicated psychodynamics play to stereotype. They grin, jive, talk smack and laugh on cue at unfunny jokes.

As far as the shoe shining is concerned, customers familiar with the ritual's traditions tend to prefer that the "boy" follow a set procedure. After the customer takes a seat on the stand, which is usually constructed such that he looms over the kneeling "boy," his shoes are brushed to remove dust, dirt and other debris.

During this phase of the ritual, pleasantries are exchanged. Customers frequently volunteer their names, and ask the name of the "boy" attending to their shoes. If the "boy" has a name or handle associated with lower-caste people of color, many customers perk up and become particularly talkative and friendly.

Nonetheless, each participant in the ritual understands that the "boy" is required to demonstrate complete deference throughout, never questioning or challenging the assumed superiority of the customer regarding all things important.

The key point to be understood is that the "boy" is expected to be submissive. Those who do so most effectively become favorites, and they earn considerably more than less demonstratively submissive cohorts who risk being considered too cool, if not inappropriately arrogant.

As the ritual proceeds, customers frequently share startlingly frank personal stories with the kneeling shoeshine "boy," in much the same manner as they commonly do with cab drivers, bartenders and prostitutes. The "boy" is expected to listen respectfully, and to grunt or groan in ways that convey empathy for the customer. Shoeshine "boys" who are unable or unwilling to participate in repartee that enhances the customer's sense of importance and superiority receive smaller tips.

Customers who develop fondness for a particularly subservient "boy" return again and again. It is not unusual to hear such customers brag that they have used

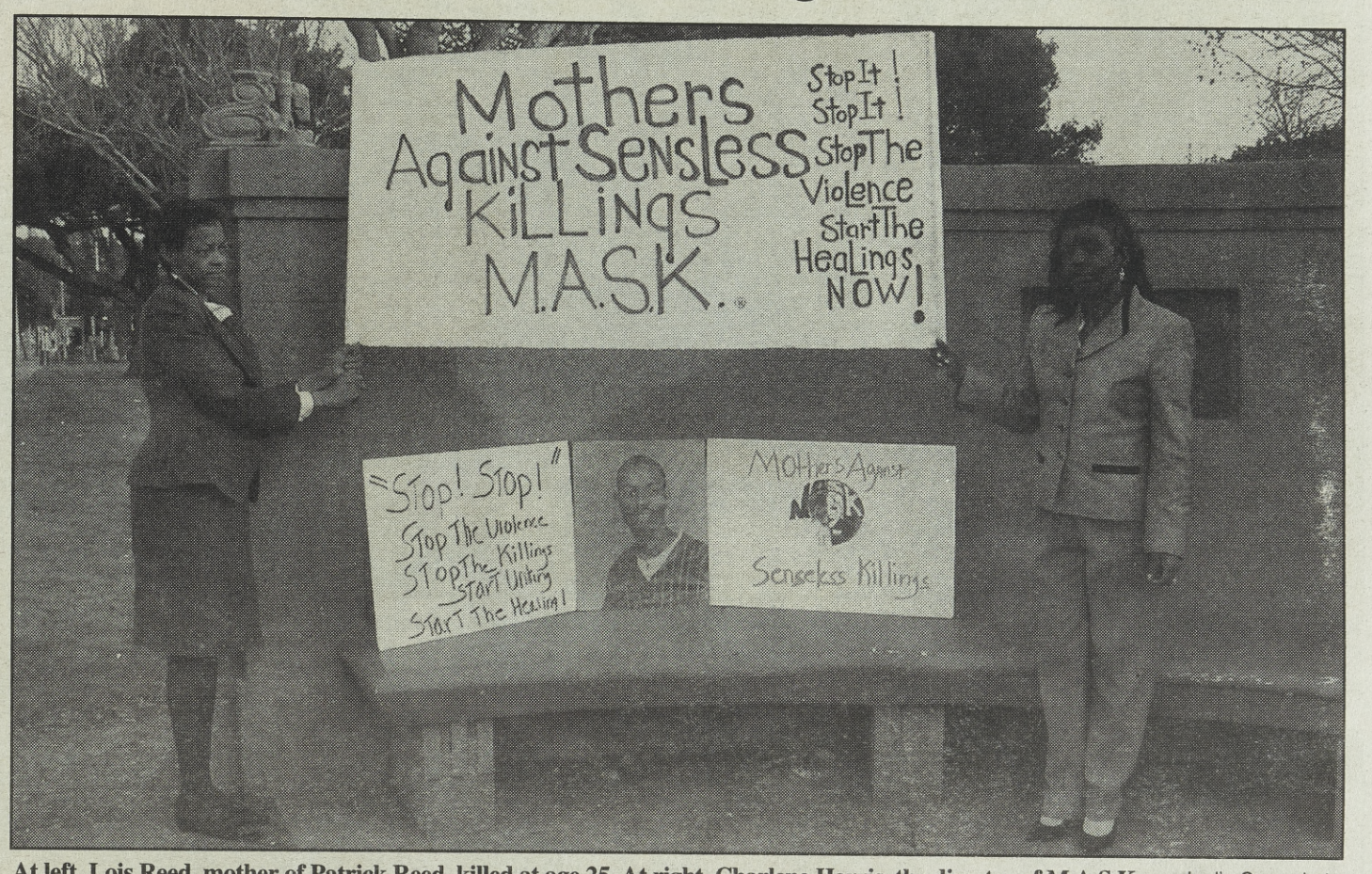
See **America's Caste System** *page nine*

'It Felt Like the Whole World Stood Still'

Mothers march in the streets to oppose senseless killings in Richmond

It felt like the whole world stood still after his mother called to say her son "had just been shot and killed by a machine gun."

by Charlene Harris



At left, Lois Reed, mother of Patrick Reed, killed at age 25. At right, Charlene Harris, the director of M.A.S.K. Lydia Gans photo

My main concern as the founder of M.A.S.K. (Mothers Against Senseless Killing) is to organize mothers and citizens in a collaborative effort to stop the senseless violence and killing in our community of Richmond, California, and surrounding communities.

The violence hit home in an unforgettable way for me as I was organizing a peace march against the seneseless killings, to be held on Martin Luther King day. On Saturday night before our march, I was working on a Remembrance Wall listing the names of slain victims, most of them young black males between the ages of 16 and 30. But the whole world stopped for me that night when one of my friends, a former member of M.A.S.K., called.

I never got a chance to finish the Remembrance Wall to bring to the march for peace. Instead, I spent the night before our march being upset and grieving over the death of a young man I had known since he was a baby. He was killed only two days prior to the march. It felt like the whole world stood still after his mother called to say her son "had just been shot and killed by a machine gun."

In recent months, we in Richmond have organized vigils in remembrance of our youth that have died here and in surrounding cities by gun violence. Recently, there has been more gun violence among young people than I have witnessed in my entire life. And it saddens me to see all the mothers and fathers who have lost their loved ones to a losing battle that the youth have declared upon each other. A lot of young people don't even have a clue as to why they are being fired upon and killed, sometimes over stupid matters.

We need to reach out in our peace efforts and break down the barriers between people, including the barriers of so-called "turf-tripping." When someone goes into a different neighborhood or area of town where they are not accepted or wanted, for whatever purpose, they can get shot just for that reason alone. Just for being out of one's own neighborhood, one can be shot or killed at random sometimes. That mentality of hatred or revenge shouldn't be tolerated.

That is the reason M.A.S.K. desperately needs community residents to become involved in stopping this epidemic of violence, instead of just sitting on the sidelines as if nothing at all is happening, or as if they just don't care. All the senseless killings that go on in Richmond, Oakland and San Francisco are just not right. It isn't right for anyone to decide to take another person's life. Some of the individuals who have been killed were innocent bystanders.

M.A.S.K. wants to raise the level of consciousness among young people about how wrong this is. We also want to raise the consciousness of the ones who think that it is not their problem. Violence affects any and everyone. It can happen any place, any time and anywhere. It is not right to feel as though it can't or won't ever happen to you or your families!

Listen up! There are many children running around our cities with weapons — as young as nine years of age! This is very frightening in itself. Think about it! What is a nine-year-old doing with a weapon? What will he do with it? He will be very foolish, of course.

This is an epidemic community problem. Yet most citizens sit back and act as if nothing is happening. Refusing to become involved is almost like saying the violence is okay. Well, it is not okay.

It is wrong when you have hundreds of churches throughout the Bay Area and most don't get involved in efforts to stop this ongoing violence. M.A.S.K. contacted over 15 churches in the Richmond area and none responded to a plea of great concern.

However, churches from different cities did respond. M.A.S.K. would like to thank all for their participation in our first annual peace march against the senseless killings, held at the Civic Center Plaza in Richmond, on January 19, 2004.

M.A.S.K. felt that was the perfect time to instill the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King — the spirit of Peace. It was one of the things he stood for. The crowd was estimated at about 200 or so individuals, including children who led the march, waving flags and shouting the M.A.S.K. slogan of "Slop the violence! Stop the killings! Start uniting! Start the healing!"

The march began with a prayer by Police Chaplain Rev. Day. The keynote speaker was Police Chief Bennett of Richmond, who wrote a very eloquent poem and dedicated it to Charlene Harris. Chief Bennet lost his only son to gun violence a year and a half ago in the city of Rodeo.

Other speakers included Earth Mother, who has healing gardens all over the world; she decided she would join in a collaborating effort to support the work of M.A.S.K. Also, Minister David from the Nation of Islam spoke very eloquently of his support of the newly founded grassroots organization, M.A.S.K. and founder Charlene Harris. Another effective speaker was Andres Sot, the Policy Director against Gun Violence.

A beautiful song was performed by Gail Harris, who lost five family members to gun violence, as well as three other nephews who also lost their lives in senseless killings. Gospel rap songs were performed by Goldie of San Francisco, and playwright Fred Jackson had everyone in tears with his upcoming CD entitled "Too Early Too Young." Poems were recited by Caroline Bagaras.

The March was closed in prayer by Minister Nation of Oakland. Channel 7 televisions news covered the story on the 5:00 news, and aired a longer segment on the 6:00 news the same evening.

America's Caste System

from page eight

the same "boy" to shine their shoes for decades.

After introductions, the "boy" begins to briskly brush the customer's shoes in order to remove dust and dirt. When this is completed, the "boy" proceeds to clean the customer's shoes. Soap and water is commonly used to initiate the process, which frequently includes the application of lanolin-based creams that soften the leather and make it more pliable.

During this phase of the ritual, the "boy" often compliments the customer on the quality of his shoes. Subsequent compliments are bestowed on the customer regarding his overall good tastes in attire, women, liquor and any other items to which his sense of vanity might be attached. By doing so, the "boy" demonstrates that he is committed to faithfully fulfilling the customer's expectations regarding his role in the stylized ritual performance in which the two of them are engaged.

The next step in the scenario involves the "boy" applying polish that must precisely match the customer's shoe color. This is preferably done by hand in a familiar and somewhat intimate fashion that involves casual squeezing of the customer's feet. Such touching engenders a sense of deep satisfaction in many customers, which is apparent from the soft grunts of appreciation they utter as the "boys" hands flutter back and forth between their feet.

After the polish dries, it is removed via brisk brushing. Minimally skilled "boys" perform this procedure with one brush. But their more skilled counterparts use two brushes, embellishing their brush strokes with rhythmic, and somewhat dramatic, flourishes that involve casually flipping the brushes in the air in ways that never break the rhythm of their application to the pleased customer's shoes.

The ritual moves towards its highly anticipated climax shortly after the "boy" finishes brushing the customer's shoes. It begins with the "boy" pulling his shoeshine rag from its resting place in one of his back pockets. Customers almost always perk up when the rag is produced, focusing intently in order not to miss any nuance of the coming performance.

Casual commentary ceases as the "boy" dramatically applies the rag to the customer's shoes. Holding the soft textured rag just so in his tightly clasped hands, the "boy" pulls the rag with increasing speed over and around the shining shoes. Finally, the "boy" begins to pop the rag in a pleasant, rhythmic fashion that produces sounds similar to those made by a drummer or bass player laying down a steady backbeat. Customers typically smile broadly as the "boy's" hands flutter up and down so quickly that they are little more than a blur.

Finally, the "boy" gives the rag a few especially hard yanks that elicit the sharp, loud, rhythmic pops which signify the ritual's impending conclusion. The final flutters and pops of the rag are followed by a light, intimate tap on the side of one of the customer's shoes. The "boy" steps back, usually showering the customer with a broad smile, which will hopefully elicit a particularly generous tip.

The convoluted, socially encoded nature of the ritualized exchanges between shoeshine "boys" and their customers is exposed by the fact that the tip frequently exceeds the cost of the shoeshine. If nothing else, this proves that the shoeshine is less important to the customer than the boy's kneeling, servile behavior.

Much needs to change before we can begin to hope again that the nation's major social problems will be eliminated.

Unfortunately, almost all of the attention currently being focused on the social problems associated with those who inhabit the sectors of society that include shoeshine "boys" and their numerous cohorts in other similarly degrading jobs, systematically avoids the decisive role exercised in the perpetuation of those problems by the atavistic addictions exercised by the nation's corrupt ruling elites.

We have a long way to go.

Now We Can Build A Future



Having a community garden helps people feel their connection to the earth as they work together. Rebecca Holder and daughter, Lakota, come to the Alameda Point Collaborative Community Garden to grow plants in a plot of their own.

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Holder



Nanette Bradley Deetz in performance at the Alameda Point Collaborative Harvest Festival 2003, with her Native American fusion band, Redbird Giving.

Photo by Teresa Kennet



Community garden plots are decorated with mosaic designs made by children and other artists.



Former Midway Shelter resident, Mosetta Rose London, now is a popular poet. She speaks on civic and cultural issues, and performs at schools, teaching self-esteem through poetry.

Mary Rudge photo

The Alameda Point Collaborative provides an amazing array of services for homeless people. It may be an important model for solving the growing crisis of poverty in the Bay Area.

by Mary Rudge

"Now we can help build an art center to bring us and the entire city together to share beauty and joy," said a formerly unemployed and homeless mother of three, with amazing confidence.

Just a few brief years ago, she had moved in with one friend after another, trying to keep her children while overcoming her dependence on drugs.

She had freed herself and her children from domestic violence and despair, and was winning the struggle against addiction, but did not know the next step toward self-sufficiency. Now she spoke from a vantage point of being established in her own apartment at Alameda Point Collaborative. She had been able to move there from the Midway Shelter, also a part of the Alameda Point Collaborative. With all the Collaborative's interactive resources, she found her way.

The Alameda Point Collaborative is located on a 34-acre site which is a small part of the 800 acres of land formerly used by the government for the Naval Air Station. It is a model program that is proving successful for the people it serves; and is an important step toward stemming the ever-growing crisis in the Bay Area of poverty, homelessness and helplessness.

Women I talked with in the programs of the Alameda Point Collaborative were realistic about the problems they had surmounted. "When you've been abducted by a stranger, or beaten up by someone you thought would love you and whom you loved, or molested by a person you trusted, you can become demoralized, defeated. When you've been betrayed by your own brain chemistry into alcoholic dependency, by emotions and ignorance into drug addiction, or feel depression or panic attacks over your fears and lack of skills, you see yourself as helpless."

They spoke frankly about what had been the worst for them. "When your children have suffered, been hungry, when you think you have failed them so badly, you feel overwhelmed with guilt and like a victim, too. In pain from any of these things — how can you cope with daily life or plan for the future?"

People can reach a condition of such low self-esteem that they feel they do not deserve the good things in life, even when others think art and other forms of expression are essential, intrinsic to the experience of life itself. Women who for years were burdened with the all-consuming concern of trying to find food, housing and income or fight addiction, could very well ask, "How can I think of art and pleasures? That's a luxury other people get, not me."

Focusing on these critical problems, how much time can people give to finding solutions for the overcoming of trauma, ways of social functioning that enable people to succeed in reaching their goals?

Some women I spoke with clarified the solution in this way: "If somehow you are offered a way out, past whatever holds you back, and you take it, and this way heals, nourishes, and shows resources that can empower you, you find your confidence that you can succeed in what you want to achieve."

Go directly to solutions

The Alameda Point Collaborative programs go directly to solutions. You help yourself and others, and make use of a wide variety of supportive services offered for each adult and child. Children, and adults too, who have never known a circle of friends have found them in the Alameda Point Collaborative community. Women needing a safe environment find it here. Children who never had a home might now even have their own room.

Given the ever-increasing number of homeless people in many cities today, it is almost a miracle that the Alameda Point Collaborative is able to provide the services, programs, leadership, land, funding, and civic support that will transform the lifestyle of any number of people who need this support. For other cities who need such a plan, the Collaborative offers an important model. The real way the miracle happens is by getting people to work together, and imparting the essential knowledge to put this workable plan into effect.

A January 2004 meeting in the home of an Alameda Point Collaborative board member brought residents of the program together with residents in other Alameda neighborhoods. The point of the meeting was to share information about the good things going on at the Alameda Point Collaborative, and the ways the program is a model for success; and to discuss how to educate the rest of the community in Alameda to be aware of this success so they could encourage and support it.

Right now, a goal of some people at the Alameda Point Collaborative whose lives have been demolished and restored, is to build an art center, surmounting the destruction left when a fire razed the building they had designated for that purpose. A number of artists in the city have already joined in this effort.

See **Alameda Point Collaborative** *page 11*



The Holder family, including Lakota and Jesse, shown here wearing traditional dancing clothes, will participate in a ceremony of blessing the land at Alameda Point, a former military base, for peace.

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Holder



A green harvest from the community gardens at Alameda Point. Nature is used to heal the land, as well as people. Homeless people learn to care for the earth.



Tiled planters enable individuals and families to choose what plants they will grow.



Community residents work cooperatively to prepare the land for new gardens.

Alameda Point Collaborative

from page 10

A NEW ART CENTER WILL ARISE FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD

Artists are among the forerunners in thinking creatively to solve problems collectively. Their enjoyment of the creative process provides a good preparation for creating a new art center. In addition to its usefulness for the community, they consider such a building to be a visible, tangible, lasting structure that will be a great symbol of revitalization — a way something useful and needed, as well as glorious, can be brought out of destruction, in the same way the women at Alameda Point Collaborative are bringing positive out of the negative they have known.

The art center also has an important practical use in fundraising events to support the on-going programs.

The City of Alameda is acknowledging noted personalities connected in some way with Alameda who rose out of poverty, or achieved their unfulfilled desires and dreams by their own talents. Phyllis Diller, who rose to national fame and fortune as a stand-up comic, once lived in a West End of Alameda housing project with her five children and husband.

William Saroyan visited his brother in Alameda often and modeled the most compassionate characters in his books after him, including Homer, a poor boy who delivers telegrams on his bicycle to help his family, in the novel, *The Human Comedy*. Jack London, after spending two years on the road jobless and 30 days in prison for "vagrancy" following his arrest for sleeping in a park, was helped to come to Alameda to attend a college prep academy, and was then able to enter the university.

Some Alameda Point residents are current examples of success in overcoming adversity, and then furthering their education. One woman is now working toward a law degree. A former Midway Shelter resident, Mosetta Rose London, worked with some of the children in the Midway Shelter to create performance acts using poems and drama she wrote. She began her own TV show, met Oprah Winfrey, and is currently one of the area's popular African-American poets who help young people build self-esteem. She visits juvenile hall and other places with her talents.

NO LONGER ALONE

London describes the benefits of her stay at the Midway Shelter as including classes, motivation "to not let disabilities get us down," group meetings, sharing cooperative chores, receiving counseling, food and clothes. And best for her, she said, was not feeling alone.

Mosetta Rose London said she at first feared what people would be like in the shelter. She was surprised that she met beautiful people, talented people, people whose jobs had been cut as her own job had, and who then became homeless, but who were resourceful and intelligent, with a lot to offer. She also saw people whose lifestyles had brought them to nothing but disaster, who had nowhere else to turn, but who learned how to change their attitudes.

While living at the Midway Shelter, she met many volunteers from other areas of the city who came to give of their own skills. She was guided into an apartment and now volunteers with numerous community projects.

There are many reasons why this total interaction of programs and facilities at the Alameda Point Collaborative works, and helps solve the difficult problems of its residents. This model can be studied and adapted elsewhere in very different conditions.

Use of the land was a big factor in how the plan was adapted to best function in Alameda. For example, other land areas where such a collaborative could be developed may not have to be reclaimed from toxins put into it. When Alameda Point was a U.S. Naval Air Station, considerable amounts of dangerous toxins kept in some areas of the base permeated the earth. It is remarkable how the land is being reclaimed and revitalized from the state of toxic contamination.

NATURE AS A HEALER

Nature is being used to heal the land, as well as people. Native plants are being grown in yard areas. Resource people, as well as people wanting to learn more about plant use, including the healing qualities of herbs, come from other places, such as Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa. They share input on regenerating the land. For example, the chemicals found in one-half acre of mushrooms can diminish toxins in the soil.

Having a community garden helps people feel their connection to the earth as they work together, each growing plants of their own choice. Working in the elements calls to mind spiritual qualities and a sense of praise. It is easy for a gardener to experience regeneration, and to feel that there is a caring spirit connecting all, One who uses the winds as his messengers (to quote from the *Psalms*).

A Native American woman, Rebecca, whose children dance traditional tribal dances at the Pow Wow gatherings throughout California as well as in other states, and the gardener then in charge of the Community Garden, Luna, explained the assets of community gardening and invited me to celebrate with them the Harvest Festivals, Solstice and other of nature's landmarks. At the Harvest Festival, people brought food to share and also ate some from the garden.

Redbird Giving, the band of a Cherokee singer, played at the Harvest Festival in November 2003, and would like to do benefits to raise money for an art center at Alameda Point.

In talking with people and visiting the Alameda Point Collaborative, I learned that the military population once on the base provided a continuous flow of temporary residents through the base and the West End of the city. Traffic choked the tunnel under the estuary through which people enter and exit the city.

In the West End business areas, many bars were opened, vying for money from the servicemen who were far from home, and creating the greatest concentration of liquor outlets in any area in the city or even surrounding cities. Most still remain in business, expecting new customers from the 2000 more people now expected to move onto the base.

What other types of businesses and services in Alameda can be expected to develop and interact with the new population on the former military base? With the base closure, Alamedans, and especially their elected officials, have had to develop their visionary skills to create standards of their own, in both construction and services; where before the federal government designed facilities and programs, and had authority.

Many in Alameda have welcomed the chance to become their own persons in deciding what best to do with this property. They looked forward to architecture that would provide continuity to the charm of Alameda as an outdoor museum of architecture such as no other city had conceived of displaying. A true vision.

Would new buildings have an airy and translucent look with lots of glass, art glass, reflecting pools, fountains? Would there be a jungle-like growth of plants, orchids, ferns, and the fragrance of rose gardens? Swimming pools? Mosaic walls? Murals? A Haiku walk? Calm centers for meditation? A spa? Would planners be concerned with the health of people, many of whom cannot afford health plans?

Controversy emerged for awhile as to whether a Peace University or center to teach skills in achieving personal and international peace, in reconciliation, arbitration,

See **Alameda Point Collaborative** *page 19*

Father Bill O'Donnell Put His Body on the Line

For many decades, the Berkeley priest was a fighter for peace, social justice and the poor and oppressed.

by Bill Berkowitz

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,
Wherever people ain't free.
Wherever men are fightin' for their rights,
That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma.
That's where I'm a-gonna be.

— **The Ballad of Tom Joad**, by Woody Guthrie

On Monday, December 8, 2003, Father Bill O'Donnell, 73, the longtime pastor at St. Joseph the Worker Church in Berkeley, died at his desk while preparing his homily for the upcoming Sunday service.

Father Bill O'Donnell's life was devoted to "speaking truth to power" and he did it with a sparkle in his eye and a smile on his face. Father Bill, as he was known to the many thousands of people whose lives he touched and influenced, was an activist priest. He not only spoke out about human rights, peace and justice, solidarity with working men and women and service to the poor, but he continuously put his body on the line on behalf of these issues.

In 1974, I joined the United Farm Workers Union boycott team in Oakland. My assignment was to organize Berkeley and North Oakland residents in support of the UFW's boycott of grapes and Gallo wines. My first night-time picket line was at a liquor store located in a generally supportive North Oakland neighborhood. It was also the first time I met Father Bill.

During the picket, a fellow stumbled out of the bar next door, wobbled over to Father O'Donnell and ripped off his collar. As picket captain, I didn't know what to expect or exactly how to react. Father O'Donnell set the tone: he smiled, calmed "the brother" down, and we went on picketing the store as if nothing untoward had happened.

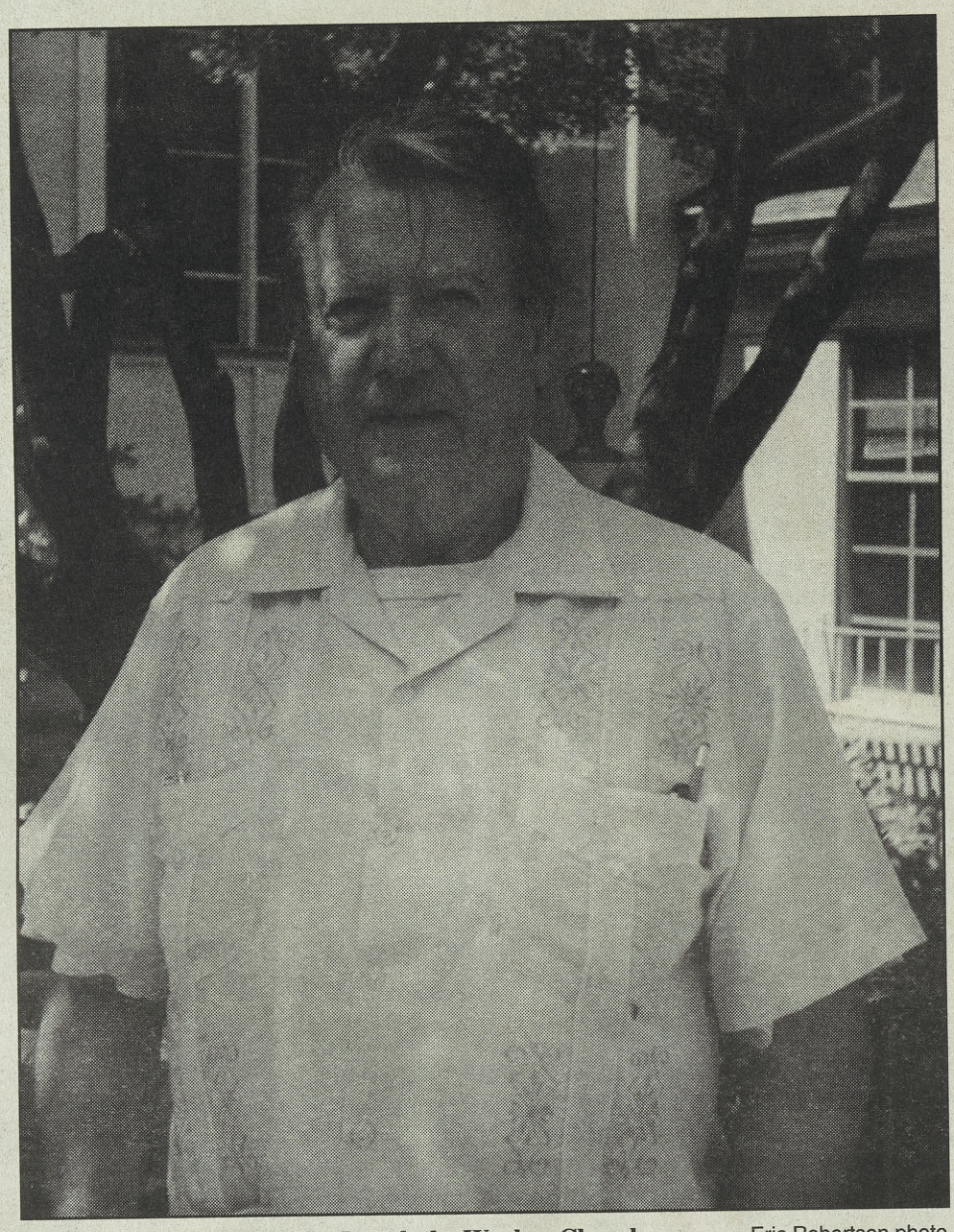
A few weeks later, at 4 o'clock on a cold, wet summer morning, a handful of East Bay boycotters gathered at Oakland's fruit terminal. Our mission was to talk with the truckers delivering non-union produce, and picket those dealers selling non-union grapes to markets from across the East Bay. It was a decidedly unfriendly crowd, to say the least, but Father O'Donnell was there leading the demonstration.

One of the truckers saw O'Donnell and screamed at him: "What's a priest doing here?" and proceeded to shove him against a stack of boxes of grapes. Bob Purcell, then the head of the East Bat boycott, recently remembered that "as always, Father O'Donnell stood his ground."

O'Donnell was born in Livermore and attended St. Michael's church and school, "and came from a large Irish family who were farmers. He told friends his Irish mother, Maude Regan O'Donnell, was the 'one who inspired me,'" *The Argus* [Fremont, CA] pointed out in its obituary.

According to *The Argus*, Father O'Donnell "once told a reporter he was 'kicked out' of three parishes before finding his rightful home. That was his assignment in 1973 to St. Joseph's, which at the time was known as St. Joseph's the Workman. O'Donnell as assistant pastor was instrumental in 'de-gendering' the name to St. Joseph the Worker, to honor the work of women as well as men."

In his well-worn leather jacket, priest's collar and black jeans, Father O'Donnell marched with Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers, was on the Justice for Janitors picket lines and got arrested with the hotel workers at the San Francisco Marriott Hotel. He could be found at the head of marches and speaking at rallies for workers seeking justice in workplaces throughout the greater Bay Area.



Father Bill O'Donnell of St. Joseph the Worker Church. Eric Robertson photo

"Labor could always count on him to be there in the day-to-day fights," Purcell, now director of the Public Employee Department of the Laborers' International Union of North America told me. "Even when the cameras weren't rolling, he was there. It wasn't just that you were calling on a priest from the local parish; he was a working class guy. He brought the moral authority of the Catholic Church and his personal integrity, and he was there whenever the cause was just. He represented the best tradition of Catholic social teachings."

Father O'Donnell was arrested more than 220 times for performing nonviolent civil disobedience at protests against Ronald Reagan's Central American contra wars, the proliferation of nuclear weapons at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and on many labor picket lines.

He recently returned to Berkeley from serving a six-month sentence at Atwater Penitentiary, a federal prison in Merced, California, for trespassing at the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security — formerly known as the School of the Americas or School of the Assassins — at Fort Benning, Georgia. "Your honor, you are pimping for the Pentagon," Father O'Donnell matter-of-factly told a federal judge before his sentencing.

After he was sentenced, he commented to a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter about the history of U.S. military actions overseas: "Philosophically, it's the bully beating up the little kid. We've been beating them up for centuries. The crusades are alive and well in Washington. D.C."

"Bill is one of the scariest people I know because he makes us tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, all the time. He takes the cup as it is offered, not altered," actor Martin Sheen once said about his close friend.

Several thousand people paid their respects to Father Bill at a memorial service at the Berkeley Community Theatre on Sunday evening, December 14. "Father Bill O'Donnell rested in a pine coffin draped by a United Farm Workers flag, serenaded with protest and union songs, eulogized by former cellmates — a measure of a man one mourner dubbed Berkeley's saint and another likened to Jesus," the *Contra Costa Times* reported.

Speaker after speaker at the memorial talked about Father O'Donnell's commitment to peace and justice and his connection to them personally. Speakers included Nancy Pelosi, Barbara Lee, UFW cofounder Dolores Huerta, UFW President Arturo Rodriguez, Chuck Mack of the Teamsters, representatives from the janitors and hotel workers' unions, Father Roy Bourgeois, a leader of the anti-School of the Americas movement, and a girl from the St. Joseph's youth group.

Perhaps the most poignant and revealing testimony came from a recovering alcoholic that Father Bill had taken under his wing. Being unemployed and homeless in Berkeley can be as daunting as being down and out in any-town USA. Father Bill not only befriended the man, but he supported him at every turn. This included giving him a car so he could go to work. The man said that he was reluctant to accept the gift, but Father Bill, with his customary straightforwardness and humor, tossed him the keys and said, "Here, it's a gift from the Pope."

Father Bill O'Donnell was just as at home marching with farmworkers, getting arrested with anti-nuclear activists, organizing prison inmates, supporting immigrant workers and ministering to the poor and homeless. That's where he was "a-gonna be" from the very beginning. And that's where he always was.

Now Face to Face

for Father Bill O'Donnell

by Carolyn S. Scarr

Now face to face
in company
with the beloved
whose broken body
you held in your two hands
raised high before the world
Now face to face
with him whose spilt blood
you raised up in the cup
whose blood you poured
onto the tracks where ran
the trains of death
Now face to face
with him whose passion
you saw in those who suffer
in those who struggle, who resist
who everywhere are brought
to countless crucifixions
whose agony you held high
Now face to face

TO THE CHILDREN

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

To the children:
We leave blues to sing and Silent Springs
We leave behind a multi-trillion dollar debt
trillions that we didn't see or get
Polluted rivers and oceans and a war-mongering mindset,
staphylococcal pets and No Rooms To Let
We leave you Arlington where widows and orphans weep
AIDS and plagues, in fearful masses sleep
Beside genocidal graves with a slave's wage
the global village and the universal slave block
and overtime removed from the time clock
we leave data from rocks on Mars, overpaid CEOs and movie stars
the heroes of our delusions and the Babel of our confusion
we leave you third rate schools producing first rate fools
content with two jobs at Mickey D's,
lines at homeless shelters fleeing the signs reading "JOB FREEZE"
we leave you the nuclear and biochemical waste dump industry
and hi tech insecurity
we leave you our patriotic songs and our rose tinted glasses
Bud Lite and Ultra Brite and treaties and buttons reading
kiss our asses
The Last Will and Testament of the Baby Boomers
Who grew fat from the spoils of WW II
Then spread war rumors to enrich all war consumers
And devised our own false and true
So we leave you doublespeak, 9/11 and the Patriot Act
Fortune Tellers deciding policies without the Facts
We leave you suspicion and its consort distrust
We leave you Lies and Alibis and Fortune Tellers to Trust
We leave you leaderless with no Lamp to guide your way.
Because we obey what the Fortune Tellers say
We can leave no brighter day.

Poor Leonard's Almanack

by Rosalie Maggio
Street Spirit February 2004

Women's Reflections on Poverty

This month's thought-provoking Almanack was compiled by Rosalie Maggio, editor of *The New Beacon Book of Quotations by Women.*

1. Poverty is an expensive luxury. We cannot afford it.
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, *Tomorrow Is Now*, 1963

2. It is hard to interest those who have everything in those who have nothing.
HELEN KELLER, *Helen Keller's Journal*, 1938

3. We live in the richest country in the world. There's plenty and to spare for no man, woman, or child to be in want. And in addition to this our country was founded on what should have been a great, true principle — the freedom, equality, and rights of each individual. Huh! And what has come of that start? There are corporations worth billions of dollars — and hundreds of thousands of people who don't get to eat.
CARSON McCULLERS, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, 1940

4. 'Tis the superfluity of one man which makes the poverty of the other.
VERNON LEE, "About Leisure," *Limbo*, 1908

5. "Ah, what can I do?" say a powerless few, /
With a lump in your throat and a tear in your eye, /
Can't you see that their poverty's profiting you?
BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE, "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying" (song), 1966

6. The poor have been sent to the front lines of a federal budget deficit reduction war that few other groups were drafted to fight.
MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, *Families in Peril*, 1987

7. Anyone who can live on welfare should be courted by Wall Street. He is a financial genius.
JOANNA CLARK, "Motherhood," in Toni Cade, editor, *The Black Woman*, 1970

8. We must be careful that the people who make $5,000 a year are not pitted against those that make $25,000 a year by those who make $900,000.
BARBARA A. MIKULSKI, speech, 1974

9. Poverty is the number-one killer of children in the United States. Doctors don't say so, at least not in so many words, because poverty isn't a medical affliction — it's an economic and social one. It kills all the same.
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

10. People who are homeless are not social inadequates. They are people without houses.
SHEILA McKECHNIE, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1985

11. In most of the traditional cultures of the world, homelessness would be impossible; first because of large protective kin systems, and second because homes were easily constructed from materials at hand. In America today we consider homelessness as a lack of shelter, not as a breakdown of community.
LYNN MARIA LAITALA, "In the Aftermath of Empire," in *The Finnish American Reporter*, 1992

12. But for the homeless all ways wither / like cut flowers.
NELLY SACHS, "World, do not ask those snatched from death," *O the Chimneys*, 1967

13. Living on the street, / under the bushes close up to the church / outside where the ground is / protected by frost, / they shelter themselves, / the ones who've lost. /

The ones we've lost, but still our own, / our children, our sisters, / our brother's child. /

Is anyone you've loved and known / without a home? / Is anyone without a home / someone you can love?
MARY RUDGE, "Anyone You've Lost," *Street Spirit*, December 2003

14. It's going to take an act of Congress to deal with poverty.... We have the resources but we don't have the will.
CORETTA SCOTT KING, in Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1983

15. By assigning his political rights to the state the individual also delegates his social responsibilities to it: he asks the state to relieve him of the burden of caring for the poor precisely as he asks for protection against criminals. The difference between pauper and criminal disappears — both stand outside society.
HANNAH ARENDT, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951

16. What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?
GEORGE ELIOT, *Middlemarch*, 1871



"Mother and Two Children." Art by Kaethe Kollwitz

Kaethe Kollwitz was a great artist, compassionate and politically courageous. Pacifist Romain Rolland said of her art: "The work of Kaethe Kollwitz which reflects the ordeal and the pain of the humble and simple is the grandest German poem of the age. This woman of virile heart has looked on them, has taken them into her motherly arms, with a solemn and tender compassion. She is the voice of the silence of the sacrificed."

17. To have and not to give is often worse than to steal.
MARIE von EBNER-ESCHENBACH, *Aphorisms*, 1893

18. The vices of the rich and great are mistaken for errors; and those of the poor and lowly, for crimes.
COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON, *Desultory Thoughts and Reflections*, 1839

19. Errors look so very ugly in persons of small means — one feels they are taking quite a liberty in going astray; whereas people of fortune may naturally indulge in a few delinquencies. "They've got the money for it," as the girl said of her mistress who had made herself ill with pickled salmon.
GEORGE ELIOT, "Janet's Repentance," *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 1857

20. I don't believe that it's true that the poor will always be with us. I think that kind of pious fatalism is just an excuse for keeping things the way they are.
MARGARET CULKIN BANNING, *The Quality of Mercy*, 1963

21. Wouldn't you think some sociologist would have done a comparative study by now to prove, as I have always suspected, that there is a higher proportion of Undeserving Rich than Undeserving Poor?
MOLLY IVINS, "Reindeer Are Counted Better Than Homeless," in *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1992

22. You are discontented with the world because you can't get just the small things that suit your pleasure, not because it's a world where myriads of men and women are ground by wrong and misery, and tainted with pollution.
GEORGE ELIOT, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, 1866

23. The Great Society's War on Poverty was also a war on alternative values. In reality it became a war on the poor, not on poverty.
LYNN MARIA LAITALA, in *The Finnish American Reporter*, 1992

24. Think of the worst experience you've ever had with a clerk in some government service job — motor vehicles, hospital, whatever — and add the life-threatening condition of impending starvation or homelessness to the waiting line, multiply the anxiety by an exponent of ten, and you have some idea of what it's like in a welfare center.
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

25. That's what a welfare check is: a certificate of blame. And it arrives every month.
JOHNNIE TILLMON, "Welfare Is a Women's Issue," in *Ms.*, 1972

26. Welfare as we know it cannot be fixed. Tinkering with it for decades has accomplished little of value. Bureaucracies within bureaucracies have bloomed, mutations of a polluted society. Too many contradictory interests compete at the public trough in the name of poor people.
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

Our country was founded on what should have been a great, true principle — the freedom, equality, and rights of each individual. Huh! And what has come of that start? There are corporations worth billions of dollars — and hundreds of thousands of people who don't get to eat. — CARSON McCULLERS

Wouldn't you think some sociologist would have done a comparative study by now to prove, as I have always suspected, that there is a higher proportion of Undeserving Rich than Undeserving Poor? — MOLLY IVINS

Poor America, of what avail is all her wealth, if the individuals comprising the nation are wretchedly poor? If they live in squalor, in filth, in crime, with hope and joy gone, a homeless, soilless army of human prey. — EMMA GOLDMAN

27. The pathos of it all is that the America which is to be protected by a huge military force is not the America of the people, but that of the privileged class.
EMMA GOLDMAN, "Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter," in *Mother Earth*, 1915

28. It didn't take too much intelligence to figure out the idiocy of paying thousands of dollars a month to "shelter" a homeless family instead of paying for a real apartment. Various layers of government blamed one another — but they were setting the rules, not Martians. Taxpayers were bilked and poor people were sacrificed as hundreds of millions of dollars were poured into the sinkholes of the social welfare establishment. Shelters. Soup kitchens. Name it. Nationwide, poverty is big business — as long as *you are politically connected.*
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

29. The poverty industry has become a veritable fifth estate. Acting as stand-ins for actual poor people, they mediate the politics of poverty with government officials. The fifth estate is a large and ever-growing power bloc that routinely and by whatever means necessary trades off the interests of poor people to advance its own parochial agenda. From the charities fleecing the state and the public, to the champagne fund-raisers charged off to Uncle Sam... the fix is in.
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

30. The [inner-city] rioting was a total enigma to most people — in the wake of all the anti-poverty legislative gifts. But poor people were neither receiving the money directly nor truly influencing how it would be spent.... [M]onies said to be for them... for the most part were getting nowhere near actual poor people.
THERESA FUNICIELLO, *Tyranny of Kindness*, 1993

31. Poor America, of what avail is all her wealth, if the individuals comprising the nation are wretchedly poor? If they live in squalor, in filth, in crime, with hope and joy gone, a homeless, soilless army of human prey.
EMMA GOLDMAN, title essay, *Anarchism*, 1910

32. Poverty? wealth? seek neither — / One causes swollen heads, / The other, swollen bellies.
KASSIANE (ninth century Byzantine nun and poet), in Elaine T. Partnow, editor, *The Quotable Woman: The First 5,000 Years*, 2001

34. When one has shoes, he won't have a coat. I choke up watching the children walk in the mud. It seems that some new people have arrived in the favela. They are ragged with undernourished faces. They improvised a shack. It hurts me to see so much pain, reserved for the working class. I stared at my new companion in misfortune. She looked at the favela with its mud and sickly children. It was the saddest look I'd ever seen. Perhaps she has no more illusions. She had given her life over to misery. There will be those who reading what I write will say — this is untrue. But misery is real.
What I revolt against is the greed of men who squeeze other men as if they were squeezing oranges.
CAROLINA MARIA de JESUS (Brazilian street scavenger), *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, 1962

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Rosalie Maggio is the best-selling author of *How to Say It: Choice Words, Phrases, Sentences, and Paragraphs for Every Situation* and *The Bias-Free Word Finder*.

A Mad Prison System Mistreats the Mentally Disabled

"With the widening gap between rich and poor, a whole lot of people suffering from mental illness are disappeared into our jails and prisons." — Dr. Terry Kupers

by Bill Berkowitz

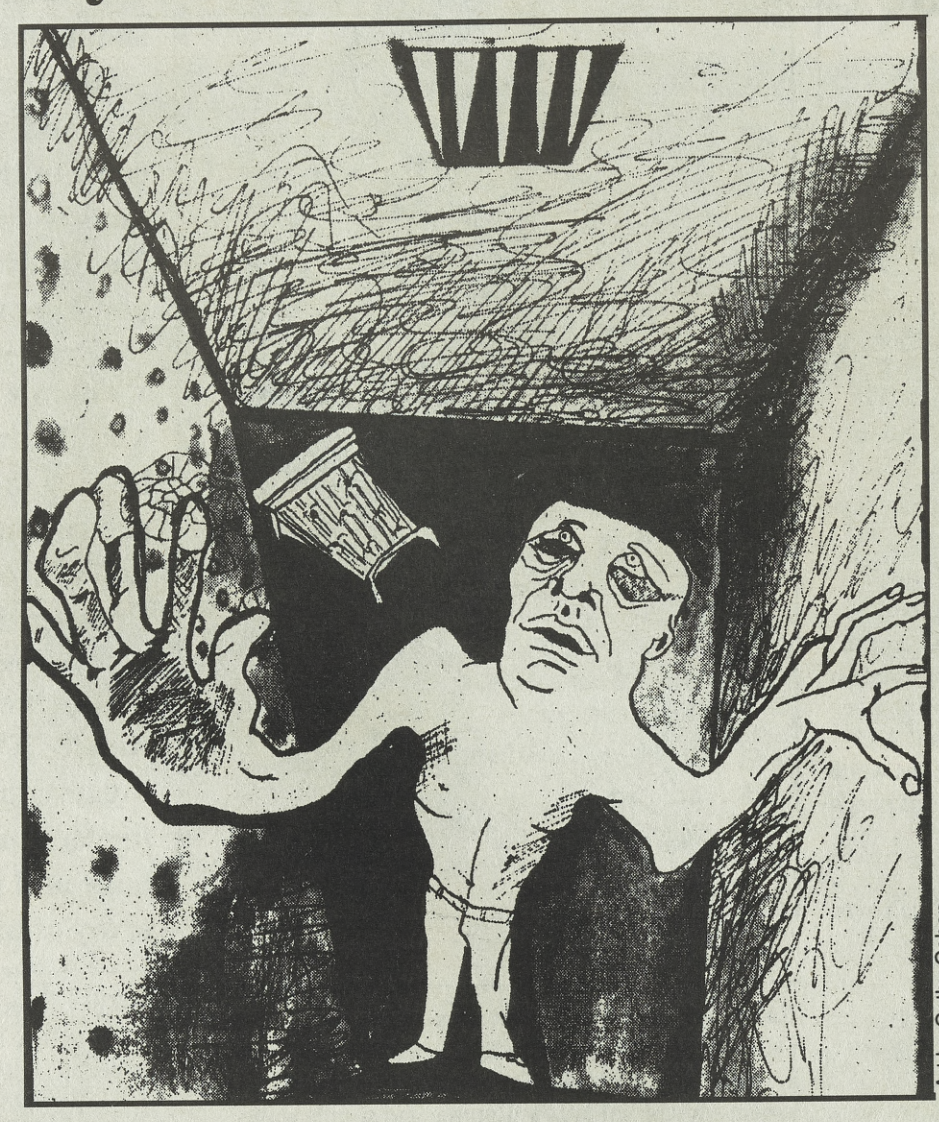
"They are afflicted with delusions and hallucinations, debilitating fears, extreme and uncontrollable mood swings," reads a disturbing paragraph from a recent Human Rights Watch report. "They huddle silently in their cells, mumble incoherently, or yell incessantly. They refuse to obey orders or lash out without apparent provocation. They beat their heads against cell walls, smear themselves with feces, self-mutilate, and commit suicide."

This description isn't about conditions faced by prisoners in a gulag in the old Soviet Union; it isn't detailing life in one of Saddam Hussein's hell holes; and it isn't about a concentration camp in some far-off place. This is a description of the situation too many mentally disabled prisoners are subjected to in U.S. correctional facilities in 2003.

According to "Ill-Equipped: U.S. Prisons and Offenders with Mental Illness," written by Sasha Abramsky, a consultant to Human Rights Watch, and Jamie Fellner, director of the U.S. Program at Human Rights Watch, people "with mental illness are disproportionately represented in correctional institutions."

One in six U.S. prisoners is mentally disabled and suffering "from serious illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression.... There are three times as many men and women with mental illness in U.S. prisons as in mental health hospitals. The rate of mental illness in the prison population is three times higher than in the general population."

Congressman Ted Strickland told the House Subcommittee on Crime's Oversight Hearing on "The Impact of the Mentally Ill on the Criminal Justice System" that, "On any given day, at least 284,000 schizophrenic and manic depressive individuals are incarcerated, and 547,800 are on probation. We have unfortunately come to accept incarceration and homelessness as part of life for the most vulnerable population among us."



Art by Cathy Cohen

The mentally ill in prison are easy prey, and "are likely to be picked on, physically or sexually abused, and manipulated by other inmates, who call them 'bugs,'" the Human Rights Watch report charges.

Based on an exhaustive two-year study that included interviews with hundreds of prisoners, corrections officials, mental health experts and attorneys, the 215-page Human Rights Watch (HRW) report maintains that the mentally disabled are warehoused without proper treatment — in many cases, without any treatment at all — "because of a shortage of qualified staff, lack of facilities, and prison rules that interfere with treatment."

The report focuses on the adult prison population, housed in nearly 1,400 adult state and federal prisons across the country. Although some prisoners are receiving adequate mental health services from "competent and committed mental health professionals," prisons operate under "rules designed for punishment" — not treatment. In addition, the fiscal crisis of most states threatens to torpedo the decent programs currently in place.

"In the most extreme cases," however, conditions of mentally ill prisoners "are truly horrific: [they are] locked in segregation with no treatment at all; confined in filthy and beastly hot cells; left for days covered in feces they have smeared over their bodies; taunted, abused, or ignored by prison staff; given so little water during summer heat waves that they drink from their toilet bowls."

The HRW report attributes the criminalization of persons with mental illness to the closure of state mental hospitals and failure of communities to provide adequate treatment and support. In state after state, the dollars that once funded state hospitals did not follow mentally ill individuals to their communities.

At least a third of the homeless population is mentally disabled, many with co-occurring substance abuse. "Many people with mental illness — particularly those who are poor, homeless, or struggling with substance abuse problems — cannot get mental health treatment. If they commit a crime, even low-level nonviolent offenses, punitive sentencing laws mandate imprisonment."

In July, the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health issued a report entitled, "Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America." The Commission found a system in shambles and concluded that there needs to be an "overhaul of the system — focusing on early diagnosis and treatment — that will enable people with mental illness to live, work and fully participate in their communities, and live meaningful lives."

The report also found that "there are many unmet needs and barriers to care for people with mental illness. And despite an increased scientific knowledge base that has led to many effective treatments, many Americans are not receiving the benefits. Too often, treatments and services are unaffordable and uneasy to access."

Over the past 20 years, the politics of lock-em-up-as-fast-as-possible became the anti-crime mantra of most politicians. Hundreds of thousands of victims of the "war on drugs" were imprisoned. As the rate of incarceration soared, so did the prison population of mentally ill inmates.

The Human Rights Watch report is only the most recent work documenting the inhumane conditions of the mentally ill in prison. In 1999, in his groundbreaking work, *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), Dr. Terry Kupers fired an early warning shot, alerting the public to a "major crisis brewing in our prisons." Dr. Kupers wrote, "We are ware-

See A Mad Prison System page 19

The Safety Net Only Benefits the Lucky Elite

by Jack Bragen

In my time as a disabled man, which has spanned about 16 years since the time my illness got worse and became a real impairment, it has become increasingly apparent that the only real safety net I and my wife have is in who we know, including our relatives and our friends in high places. The safety net has nothing to do with anything our government provides.

I and my wife are members of what I call, the "Elite Disabled": those who are lucky enough to be connected to a support network of family who have money and resources with which they assist us, and members of the community who know us and who will sometimes pull strings on our behalf.

Without this support network, we would be at the mercy of the whims of fickle individuals in local and federal government, many of whom have the ability and sometimes the will to make devastating determinations concerning our income and housing.

Since the government is not known for providing a five or six figure income with which to secure the services of lawyers, it seems nearly impossible to obtain one who has competence or even one who is truly interested in helping disabled people. There are horror stories of public defenders, for example, that make no real effort in obtaining a fair trial for the penniless accused.

At times when government agencies or other entities believe they can get away with doing injustices to us, it is extremely hard to find attorneys willing to take a case for us, since their prospects of profiting are not good. Being disabled often precludes performing the footwork and evidence-gathering for such suits.

Famous criminal cases such as the O. J. Simpson trial serve as obvious proof that a fair trial is linked to how much money you can pay to attorneys. Persons now being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, are non-disabled examples of persons who can be singled out based partly on not having enough family and friends to raise a stink on their behalf. Or, so hopes the Bush administration.

Closer to home, I know people who have been victims of the decisions of fickle people in positions of power. A good friend was physically assaulted and subjected to identity theft, but his case was simply put on a shelf by the local police department. This person had a series of misfortunes happen to him, most of which he had no choice but to simply endure.

It is often the case that a person's disability, along with the submissiveness that has been inculcated over the years, make it doubly difficult to be assertive, and to stand up for one's rights. My wife, at an earlier time, could not get State Disability Insurance, due to the fact that her doctor — apparently, out of a pure whim — refused to do the paperwork. And, I am sure there are astronomically more glaring examples of injustices that happen to disabled people who are not members of the "Elite Disabled."

When people do not have this support network I described, they are left wide open to being victimized by people in power who misuse their power for their own enjoyment of being powerful.

Fear at the Disability and Income Review

Fiction by Jack Bragen

We swerved through traffic frantically, so as not to be late to that old, familiar office complex at 221 D Donut Street. The complex towered before us, its silhouette obscuring more than half the sky. Its towers and skyward spiral smokestacks and latticework nearly touched the dirty, brown-and-gray sky.

We entered the SSI and SSDI review office. A door automatically opened and a silvery android motioned for us to follow it along a linoleum-lined, sterilized, fluorescent-lighted hallway.

Then it motioned for us to enter the exam room for stage 1. A young man in quasi-medical garb with an ear-to-ear smile informed us that he would be checking for hidden income. While he told us this, he simultaneously put a rubber glove on his outstretched right hand...

Much later, the android took us to another room for stage 2: the "Are You Still Disabled Table." Here, a man in a necktie and spectacles asked: "Do you know who is the President of the U.S.?"

I said, "Yes..." and the man's hand motioned me to silence before I could say more.

My wife and I were then walked to a waiting room that had no furniture, no windows and no knob to open the single door. After two hours in this room, with no restroom and no drink of water, the android handed us a piece of paper while voicing an apology in digital audio.

The sheet read: "Dear sir and madam: You had hidden income in the form of three (3) polyps which could be exchanged for cash. You are not disabled, since you scored 100 on the competency test. You no longer qualify for any benefits of any kind, ever again. You owe us $33,000.24. Payment is required to exit." *The End*

New Struggle for Social Justice in Public Transportation

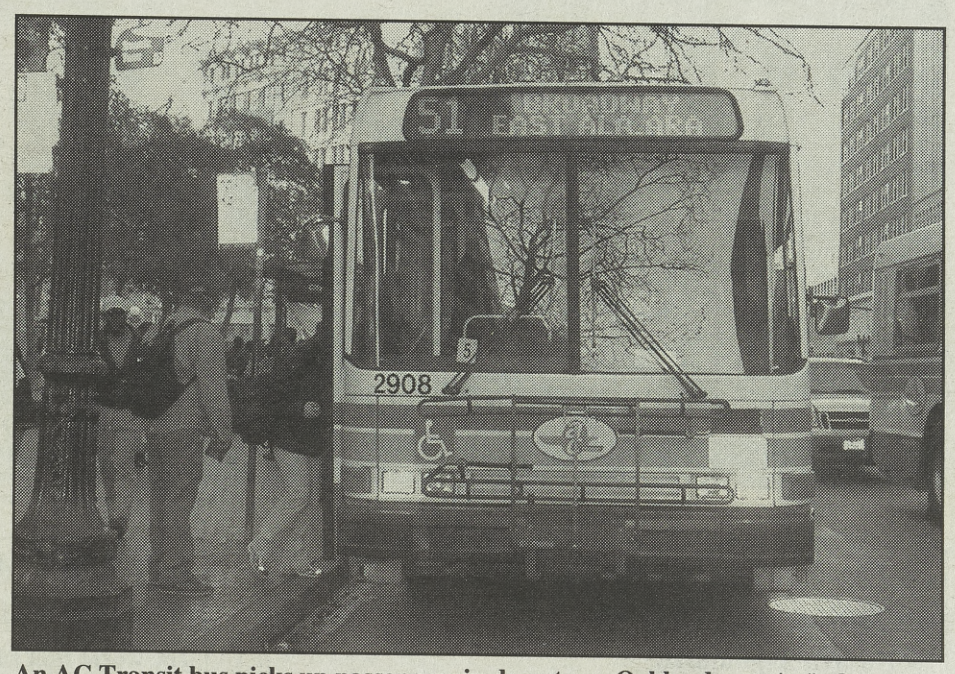
In the East Bay, public transit services for the low-income, the disabled and the elderly are being rolled back.

by Bob Mills

In the East Bay, homeless and social justice advocates are determined to launch a strong campaign in 2004 for a better and more efficient means of public transportation. Public transportation is more than an environmental issue. It is a crucial issue for low-income people who are unable to afford owning a vehicle.

As critical as housing and health care, public transportation is needed to get to social services, doctor's appointments, take the children to school, and go to work. You are paralyzed if you do not have access to some means of transportation, especially in the Bay Area.

Recently, a coalition of homeless advocates, social justice activists, and environmental, health, youth and transportation organizations have challenged the decision-making body of the entire Bay Area transit authority — the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC). The MTC boasts about their transportation outreach. They have six focus groups, 26 targeted workshops, and a telephone poll. For a public agency, this appears to be a good thing, as a critical part of good community planning.



An AC Transit bus picks up passengers in downtown Oakland. Lydia Gans photo

However, equally critical is how this input is used, and incorporated into the planning. Yet the MTC seems to have gone through the routine of carrying out a token form of outreach, after already making up its mind. They conducted the outreach to fulfill legal requirements, but had no intention of really listening to the poor, the elderly, the disabled and other low-income commuters.

All these outreach efforts pointed to some very specific recommendations which affect the poor. Oddly, MTC is going ahead with its recommendations and paying lip service to the outreach plan. The numerous work groups, focus groups, and telephone surveys clearly indicated the critical need to continue services for the low-income, the disabled and the elderly. But these services are being rolled back.

The Transportation Justice Working Group has been meeting with MTC for the last year and confronted it in a demonstration at the end of 2003 to demand more justice for low-income people. We presented them with an alternative funding option, which more reflected social equity. This option included the following conclusions:

- After ascertaining that a social imbalance in resource allocation exists and that the MTC is discriminating against low-income communities and people of color, the proposed MTC spending options for the lifeline Transportation Program are extremely insufficient and unacceptable.
- MTC must be held accountable for their planning process, and their funding must be consistent with the recommendations from their outreach efforts.
- The inherent masked racism of denying a mechanism for people of color to be a part of the decision making must cease.

What it all boils down to is that the homeless, communities of color, low-income families, the disabled and the elderly currently do not have a real voice in the decision-making process about their means of transportation, which is publicly funded by taxpayer dollars, and is mandated by social justice and federal law. We can change all that, as the MTC is still working on their 30-year plan and review every couple of years.

For more information, contact Grace Han, Urban Habitat, at (510) 839-3716 or Bob Mills of BOSS at (510) 677-4147.



Meridian Gallery announces

Hubris Corpulentus

Prints by Art Hazelwood

January 15 to February 28, 2004
Meridian Gallery, 545 Sutter St., San Francisco
Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday to Saturday

Panel Discussion: ***Functions & Uses of Political Art Now***
Saturday, February 14, 2004, 2 p.m.
Panel Moderator: Peter Selz
Panel: Art Hazelwood, Jos Sances and DeWitt Cheng
The panel will focus on political art as it is manifested in contemporary society; the relevancy of political visual art for a wider community in the wake of the war in Iraq.

Artists Show Their Wares: ***From Rags to Posters***
Saturday, February 21, 2004, 2 p.m.
Anti-war protests this past winter sparked many people who never before made art to create political imagery on signs, billboards, T-shirts, buttons, bumper stickers, banners, and performances. This open house event invites these artists to share with each other and the community their political voice.

contact: Corinna Press 415.398.7229



From the series of 10 engravings entitled "Hubris Corpulentus" by Art Hazelwood, engraving, Courtesy of Meridian Gallery.

The Art of Art Hazelwood

Hubris Corpulentus is a state of obscene, overweening pride that produces monstrous realities out of the stupor of irrationality. The prints of Art Hazelwood lay claim to such a title in their representations of Wall Street, war and the absurdities of society. Over 30 of his prints are now on display at Meridian Gallery.

A series of 10 engravings on the war in Iraq gives its name to this exhibition. Hazelwood says, "After it became clear that nothing would stop the U.S. march to war in Iraq, and my sense of frustration mounted, the only course that seemed open was to channel despair into small concise statements. Engraving seemed like the best way to focus. It is a laborious process: a method of cutting a metal plate with tools to create an image. The minuteness, obsessiveness and control required were the perfect match for my wish to focus anger at details of this monumentally hubristic war."

"I did not presume to portray the photographic reality, nor the horrors of war. I focus instead on the metaphorical and satirical nature of the enterprise. *Liberty Brought to Baghdad* portrays a bound and blindfolded lady liberty, roughly treated by troops dragging her off to her newly intended. *The Four Horsemen* portray the classic four figures of death, war, pestilence and famine striding above the globe while below insignificant peace protesters march in ant-like swarms."

Art Hazelwood has worked over the past 10 years with the *Street Sheet*, San Francisco's newspaper on homelessness, providing images to complement their articles. These and other prints on subjects such as paranoia, high school shootings, election year politics, urban professionals and addiction are the target of Hazelwood's satirical eye. The print techniques employed range from woodcuts and linocuts to etchings, engravings and lithographs as well as book projects.

We, The People

It's We, The People — Not Governments Who Will Save the World

We, The People

by Claire J. Baker

War, and the threat of war
shall be softened by Afghani
women folding baby clothes;

by destitute Brazilians
taking over unused land —
farming for their lives;

by poets emerging planetwide
from the pores of paper, writing
lyrically & hard-edged of peace;

by Saint Anthony diners
given daily meat & vegetables,
clean rosy apples of respect;

by grandmothers
making sock dolls
for refugee children.

IT'S WE, THE PEOPLE —
NOT GOVERNMENTS
WHO WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

New Street Spirit

by Michael Creedon

Life is a scientific room
Camera lens at Zoom
Charlie gets the broom
Time closing him in
To a doorway at high noon.
Just trying to catch a snooze.

I prefer not to look
Charlie gets hit by a truck
Guess I'm out of luck
Scientific truck
Camera lens at Zoom
The sky is closing in.

Police pass me by
Hiding in a door
Watching Charlie's ghost snore
Hundred degrees of heat
Outside Amoeba Music
Trying to catch a breath.

Street people go down
I keep looking around
Hottest spot in town
Candy shoots me a frown
She's doin' the Mess Around
Caught in the camera lens
Waving her new Street Spirit.

Home Making

by Lynda Cobden

Jake put a blanket over the
shopping cart and created a sense of
privacy and a tent-like structure
in the doorway.
He huddled down in his sleeping bag
clutched close to the body.
An unfinished plate of chicken and rice
semi-covered in aluminum foil
was at his side.
It is a testimony of kindness
on another tough night of
bare bones survival.
The night is long.

Give Us This Day

by Lynda Cobden

There are stones of indifference.
There is tunnel vision.
Twenty-five dollars a day for a room
equals a lot of recycled cans and labor.
The blinds are already closed.
Let there be light.
Crumble the stones of indifference.
Give us this day our daily bread.

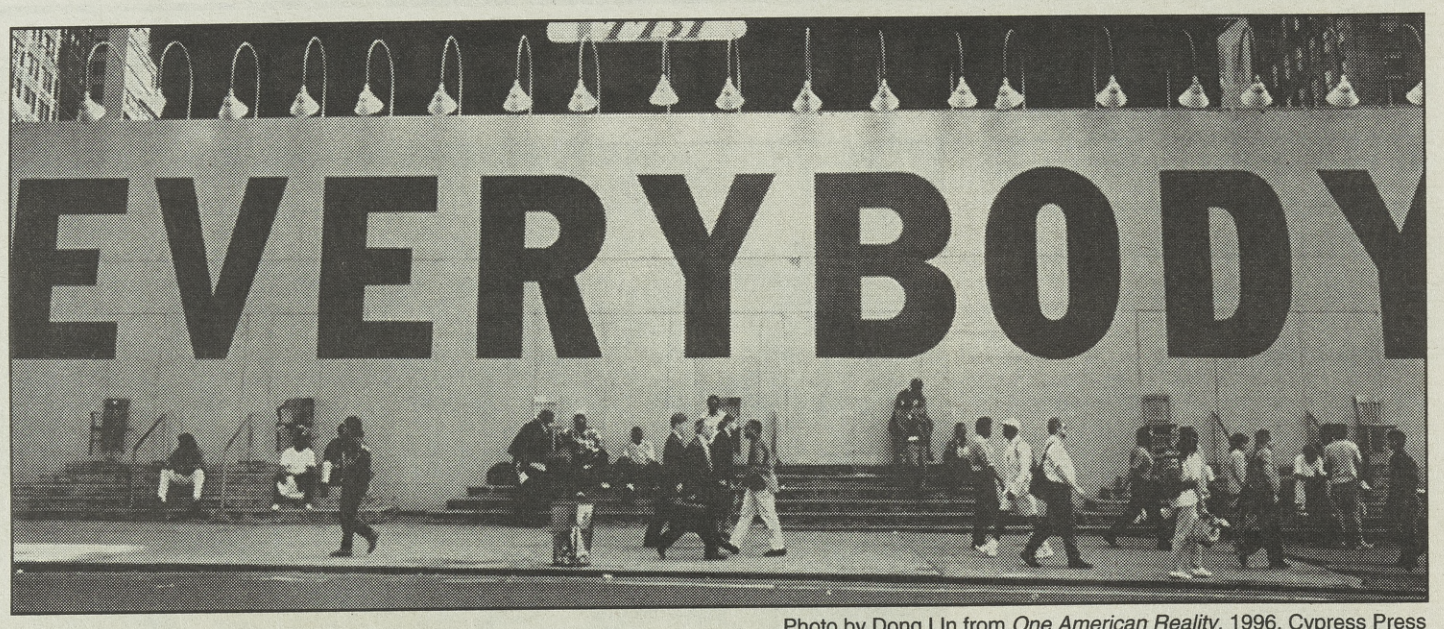


Photo by Dong LIn from *One American Reality*, 1996, Cypress Press

O.D. AND COMPANY

(ORIGINAL DREAM MAN)

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

If I were a Banker I dreamed
What would make me rich?
That I could ride in my limousine while
My depositor digs a ditch?
While I wine and dine with caviar
And in a rich mansion sleep
My twenty percent from mortgages and rent
Will provide my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake
You can say I had and ate my cake
I dreamed I was the Man of Stone
They throw me a dollar
I throw them a bone
While they pay me to use their money
So that I can get rich, see?
Am I to blame and complain that they're insane?
Who else should dig that ditch? Me???
The interest game is so insane and even the Bible tells you so
Pawning off your future when there's nowhere else to go.
In reality, I was just a Pimp despite my noble air
Tho' I see the world through green-tinted glasses
Who said that I must be fair?
With disagreement I just don't care
I am the Original Dream Man
Your Get Rich Quick Scheme Man
I loan you back your money
So that you can work for me
To support my land of milk and honey
O.D. and Company
I call and you come
I walk and you run
My Reality is your Dream
That's the Con in My Scheme
I am the Rat Race Ring Master
Platinum Card Spell Caster
If I ignore you
Poverty's for you
I take my profits off the top and then my salary
And if there's nothing left
Well... there's no Cop — but me!
So since there's just enough for some
Let me be the banker and you be the bum.
That's the Original Dream... see?
O.D. and Company

He Won

by Lynda Cobden

His wife said you raise him and handed him
his three-year-old son.
She boarded a Greyhound bus and moved across the country.
For years they never heard from her.
He said I am a homeless Black man trying to find a way
to raise my three-year-old son.
The train station bathroom became their room for the night.
They slept on the concrete with the bathroom door locked,
away from the grinding weariness of homelessness.
He sought to give his boy just a little security,
just a little normalcy.
He went to the local shelters and applied to the programs
for homeless mothers, and they made an exception,
and he and his son were accepted for shelter.
During the day he pursued his real estate broker license.
He made many people money and said the green color of
money is a universal color sought and needed by all.
He saw every cold call as a chance to liberate
his son and himself from homelessness.
He won the battle and inspires and helps others.

AMERICA DISSOLVED

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

The world that surrounds you (America)
Is in part, of your creation
What lies beneath your turbid sky
Foretells your future's desecration
Perishable trinkets and iron beauty
dissolving in acid rain and snow
The rape of the earth for a trinket's birth
As Merchants slyly ply them, or Hustler's cop and blow
despite the famished forays
Of the scavenging strays
Huddled beneath the concrete pillars
Prop the Merchant's paper sky
While you lay upon some battlefield
For the Phantoms who sent you to die
and you never questioned why.
The world of your eminent domain
Emanates from the Merchant's mind
Where everything becomes commodities
Even every human kind
Touting yourself on the slave block
As the best that money can buy
Obedient, docile and loyal
To orders you won't deny
Knowing that other willing minions
vie to take your place
Willing to underbid you
For the Merchant's approving grace
While the dissolving world perishes
Then renews as trinkets with which to play
each dawning tomorrow
Eclipses your yesterday
In your rusting urban jungles cry
The ragged urchins the Merchant's cruelly deny
But submissive, Puppet Rag dolls, exchanging IOU's
It's Usury — enslaving you
Disguised on paper that turns earth's beauty into dust
Emblazoned with Satanic mocking hand
Inked — In God We Trust.
As the world dissolves into the empty bowl
Unfilled by the amber fields of grain
Extolled by glowing corporate reports
Of the growing corporate gain
Dissolving into the statistical tales, of growing violent crime
Assured by filling the corporate prisons
With every excluded kind
Whose excluded, concreted view
Is the view of all of you.

where have all the windmill fighters gone

by Randy Fingland

unescorted through the media portals
of short-lived praise
the real heroes
aren't recognized for momentary bravery
in a one-time hostile field

they are the flesh and blood
of the infrastructure that holds
the remains of western civilization in place

although much evidence suggests without success

what with the antiheroes
everywhere in upper positions of responsibility
steadily at work
to dismantle
the very things that have mande any sense
from when the Greeks wore togas to the forum
to hear Demosthenes establish democratic precedents

Angela Alioto Reveals Her Homeless Plans

from page four

the volunteer?"

"Are you still negative on shelters?" I asked her.

"Exactly! I've always said — and Barbara Taylor of KCBS has taken me to task for it — *Do away with shelters*!"

I asked whether her goal was to move people out of shelters and into housing.

"Yes," she emphasized. "Supportive housing! Supportive housing! Supportive housing!"

Alioto had championed Proposition J, an initiative approved by the voters on the November ballot. Prop J is a way to begin a triage system in which, preparatory to moving seniors, families, youth, and disabled people to supportive housing, these most vulnerable populations are housed in their own separate shelters.

"I think this year with Gavin Newsom we are going to be able to implement Prop J to a big degree," she said. "Supportive housing is organized by the diagnosis."

Once the funding is available, "we will be able to move them right into their supportive housing." She said Mongano told her, "Supportive housing: Get me a ten year plan, we'll get you federal money."

Alioto said she "is 100 percent behind an $150 million bond for supportive housing. It is absolutely essential to be part of the 10-year plan so we can get federal funding, and because supportive housing is, in fact, what we need."

THE ANTI-PANHANDLING LAW

I reminded Angela that, during the campaign, she had been critical of Gavin Newsom's anti-panhandling initiative, Proposition M. As a civil rights lawyer, she cited the violation of civil rights.

She said, "If I were to stand on Van Ness and ask for a dollar to give to St. Anthony to help homelessness, for a vote, or anything of value — and I said this throughout the campaign — I would be in violation of Prop M. I'm against Prop M, and I'll always be against Prop M."

Was Prop M directed at the homeless?

"You are assuming a fact not in evidence — that people who panhandle on the islands are homeless," she replied. "If you investigated, you would not find that true in 100 percent of the cases. If you get to know the homeless population, you can differentiate between the true homeless and those who are 'in the business,' dealing drugs. So, it's not a matter of it applying to homeless people."

Didn't the general electorate believe Prop M targeted homeless people? I asked

"The general electorate believes people standing on islands asking for money are homeless. Now, why is that? I guess the sign says, 'I'm homeless.' C'mon!"

Insisting that homeless people "get a bad rap," Alioto told Mongano that if he talks to some of our homeless population, he would meet some very smart people. Notice the number of homeless people "always reading books," she said, in contrast to "the figure of shooting up on an every-five-minute basis that we were given in all those stupid ads."

She confirmed there is a lot of heroin use, and drug abuse. "But, that isn't what homelessness is about."

Alioto and Newsom disagreed both on Prop M, and on Care Not Cash. She endorsed Supervisor Chris Daly's Real Housing initiative, which would allow a person's General Assistance to be converted into a voucher only if real housing were provided, not merely a vague promise of a shelter bed.

WILL NEWSOM KEEP HIS PROMISE?

Considering past conflicts, how likely was Newsom to fulfill his promise to give Alioto real power in his administration to successfully address homelessness?

"He already has given me the power," she answered.

"If I got 200 people off the streets of San Francisco this year, it has nothing to do with Prop M or Prop N," she said. "If Gavin Newsom wants to go get it done by enforcing M and N, that's him. That's not me." Since their mutual goal is to get people off the street, Alioto said that Newsom would be delighted if she helped him meet that goal.

"Does Gavin Newsom want people off the streets?" she asked. "Of course he does! That was his promise. That's what people were hoping for. That's what's going to get him further in his career. I think he is committed to getting poor people off the street, for compassionate reasons, for cynical reasons, for whatever reason."

Alioto emphasized that since everyone, including the supervisors, has the same goal of reducing homelessness, if she presents them with legislation worked out with the department heads that achieves that goal, how could they vote against it?

She said that Newsom has given her everything he promised. It was explicit in their agreement that the department heads answer her. "Gavin told the department heads, sitting there with Mr. Mongano, 'When Angela calls, answer her. Treat her as though she is me.' He went on about it for five minutes."

She cautioned, "There's no glory, though. The man won. I lost. I'm acutely aware of that. He's the mayor of the city."

She will not surprise him in any way, she said, or hold press conferences about conversations with department heads. Her mission is to get people off the streets, not embarrass the new mayor.

"Two people told me today, 'You're doing all this work without the glory.' I said, 'But, isn't that great!'"

One day, at Pacific and Van Ness, Alioto saw a man on the corner. She rolled down the window, and gave him a $5 dollar bill. "I voted for you," he said. "I promise I won't ever be out there again. I'm only out here for a couple of hours."

A politician's discomfort at asking for money made her aware of the humiliation he must have felt to beg. She told her brother, "Nothing anyone could give me would equate to the joy of getting a home and a job for that guy. You couldn't pay me ten million dollars that would make me feel the way I feel when I help people like that."

She wants to be able to call the department heads and say, "Where is this shelter? What does this shelter make? Who kicks people out?" And, if she sees something she doesn't like, she wants to go to the Board of Supervisors and say, "Do a piece of legislation right now to stop them from treating people this way."

CRIMINALIZING THE POOR

The last two mayoral administrations have viciously criminalized homeless people for asking for help, sitting on benches, covering themselves up, lying on the street. Did she think she could turn that around while working with Newsom?

Alioto replied that she believed that Newsom, working with Mongano and with the department heads, would make a concerted effort to get people off the street in "the non-military way."

I asked if that meant they were not going to have the police throwing them around in the Civic Center and arresting them, as with the Matrix program.

"I don't think you'll ever see that again. Matrix didn't work. As president of the Board, I banned Matrix. That's not the way you deal with this. Isn't that the definition of stupid? Trying something over and over when you know it doesn't work, and think it's going to change?"

I told Alioto I thought that Newsom and the business community might like homeless people to solve the problem by leaving town. She said she was sure they would, but how would they do that?

By making it too expensive to live in San Francisco, I replied.

"It didn't work! It didn't work!" she insisted, laughing. "You know," she continued, "if you believe that his measures were militant and all the rest of it, we are the odd couple, Gavin and me! I also believe, though, that he doesn't want to do something that doesn't work. He does not want to fail. So there's that going for us."

PUSHING FOR PUBLIC POWER

She believes their area of conflict will be public power, because "I am an advocate for eminent domain *now*." For 80 years, PG&E has cheated the City of its birthright. Alioto said she would not hesitate to "have the guts" to declare eminent domain over every easement PG&E has.

She met with City Attorney Dennis Herrera, who has Charter standing to enforce public power, ensuring that Mission Bay, Catellus, and all new buildings would automatically be offered public power first. She was excited by Herrera's December 19, 2003, op-ed e-mail to the *Chronicle* editor saying, "I can't take this anymore. These people are stealing from us."

"Now we are going to have our gas bills up to pay their debt, and they have the nerve to be paying $180 million bonuses!" she said. "If this bankruptcy bailout settlement isn't enough incentive for anybody to be angry and take back our power, I don't know what is."

Immediate acquisition of power "was a pretty scary thought," she said. You want to first make sure the City can handle it.

Alioto said she thought her arrangement with Newsom upset downtown businesses, one of which is PG&E.

She asked Newsom, "I'm somewhat of an advocate here, and this is a very important issue. Before I die, I want there to be the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company. So, are you sure you have no real ties with PG&E?"

He said, "Yes. I'm sure." "Or I would not have made the deal," Alioto said.

She said she has no reason not to believe Newsom because of the way he has treated her.

"He could have said, 'I'm the mayor of San Francisco. Get lost, Angela.' Instead, he invites the homeless czar, Phillip Mongano. He invites me. He invites all the department heads. He introduces me as his partner, and he tells them all that they are to act as though they are working with him. In my opinion, he has been extremely true to his word.

"I appreciate that, because I know a helluva lot of so-called progressives that are not true to their word, nor are they honest. They know who they are. Honesty is an important virtue to me."

Alioto was voicing her extreme displeasure with the way some progressives attacked her when she endorsed Newsom for mayor. "I took some serious hits without fighting back," she said. "The progressives are the ones who were the most outrageous! Cruel! Unbelievable!"

Lashing out at her may have cost them. Negative mailers were sent out calling her dishonest and unethical, antagonizing Alioto supporters.

Yet rival mayoral candidate Matt Gonzalez hugged her at the inauguration. She appreciated his saying they would always be friends.

"That was the most difficult two months of my entire 20-year-old political career," Alioto said of the attacks she faced. "I can't tell you how tough it was!"

For 25 years she had fought for issues Matt Gonzalez supported, and against homeless programs Newsom promoted.

"I don't fight or believe superficially," Alioto said. "This is not stuff that I consider unimportant. I have come to realize that a lot of people just don't believe in the issues like I do."

She expressed pain about disappointing supporters by supporting Newsom. She answered all 800 e-mails, asking, "Why am I torturing myself?"

The problem with the "ethical accusation" was that she cared so much about homelessness, public power, and the City. "You can do almost anything to me, but don't question my integrity!" she said, adding that she doesn't make agreements "behind closed doors."

"The whole thing was a press conference!" she pointed out. "I am endorsing him because I know I'm going to be there to make sure the things I care about actually change."

During "an amazing two months," she said, her house was egged and smashed with pumpkins. She received death threats. She called the police once, when her children were threatened.

In her pre-endorsement *Guardian* interview, she said she wouldn't endorse Gonzalez because he is building the Green Party. She said she likes the Greens, but enlarging their party "does nothing but elect Republicans. If Nader hadn't run, Gore would be president. So, we end up with a guy killing babies in Iraq."

She asked rhetorically, "Did the Democratic Party so ruin its core values that it created a Green Party?" "Yes!" she answered, but then warned, "if you vote Green, you end up with a Republican."

Alioto described herself as a civil rights lawyer fighting in American courtrooms under laws written by Democrats, whether for the disabled, for racial issues, or whatever. "It is no little issue to me!" she said. "For people to minimize it was very upsetting."

She felt that the Democrat Party had deserted "us progressives. They ought to actively recruit us back."

She said she fears Democrats have forgotten who they are. "If you forget who your roots are, if you don't have a thorough understanding of where you came from, who those people were, what they suffered so that you could sit in this gorgeous living room or dining room looking out on the Bay — if you don't get what those poor Sicilians went through, you don't know where you are going tomorrow, and if you don't know where you are going tomorrow, you are in bad shape. That's why this means so much to me! And that's the Democrat Party. I will die a Democrat no matter what the Democrats do."

She said she planned to help the Democrats reclaim their core values by insisting that elected officials understand the Democratic Party stands for the Bill of Rights, for civil rights, for freedom — not for the Patriot Act.

She reflected, "I didn't go through those two months of pain to not have answers. Why should I be the sacrificial lamb? I did what I did because I'm a Democrat. What I did made a difference in this race. Ask (pollster) David Binder if Matt Gonzalez went down five to six points the week of my endorsement. Then ask Gavin Newsom's campaign manager, Eric Jaye, if Gavin went up four points."

It did not make her feel good that "Matt went down," she said, but it made people think.

"The public sees two people, one conservative and one very liberal, actually creating a coalition government in the areas of homelessness, public power, and contracts. People said to me all the time from the street, 'What a great idea!'"

She said she "will never forget" the progressives, writers, and members of the gay community who have said they will always appreciate her work. "People that I'd been in the trenches with for ten years on power issues, or on Sunshine ordinances — it was my friends who were highly critical."

They Have a Dream

from page one

Ruben Briones, assistant to Alameda County Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker, described the overwhelming difficulties the county is having in providing necessary human services. "Alameda County Social Services has reduced its budget by $60 million in the last 18 months," Briones said. "This is roughly 11 percent of the entire budget."

Speaking on behalf of Supervisor Lai-Bitker, Briones declared, "We join the Safety Net Coalition in asking our governor to stop his attack on California's safety net. It is clear that any more reductions come on top of already under-funded programs. The supervisor has grave concerns about the impacts the governor's proposed reductions will have on our community.

"She is aware that each proposed cut, if adopted, will result in skipped meals for kids, injuries for seniors due to the lack of supportive services, no access to medical care for our sick neighbors, and no childcare for working parents. We stand united with organizations present here in demanding that our leaders in Sacramento propose a more equitable budget, a budget that looks at all the potential solutions to the state deficit, including raising taxes and supporting economic growth that maintains the safety net intact. Anything less is unacceptable."

A dramatic interlude was presented at the conference in the form of a procession up the aisle of "pallbearers" carrying a coffin. It was inspired by a comment of the governor's that "new taxes will be the nail in the coffin of California's economy."

To a musical background, the marchers and soon the entire audience repeatedly chanted the refrain, "We Are Dissatisfied." One participant said, "The real coffin in Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed budget is the coffin for our economic human rights!" To emphasize the symbolism, participants and attendees had been asked to wear black for the occasion.

More inspired speeches followed this demonstration, pointing out some of the other worthy programs that the governor proposes to cut. Jim Forsyth, representing the Congress of California Seniors, spoke of the cuts that would hurt seniors, particularly cuts in the In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program that provides in-home assistance to people with disabilities and on Medi-Cal. Forsyth said the proposed cutbacks "are cruel and unworthy, but they are also idiotic because they will cost us more in the long run."

Mary Perry Smith, a teacher, spoke about the MESA program (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) an outreach program that helps disadvantaged students train to become scientists. The governor want to cut this program that has successfully functioned for 33 years.

Antonio Christian, president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unions, said emphatically, "The Bible tells us the poor will always be with us. Yeah, but let's take care of the poor!" Linda Griffin, a member of Operation Dignity who works with homeless families at the Henry Robinson Center, recalled the outpouring of community help during the holidays, but added that there is a need for continuing aid for the rest of the year.

BOSS Executive Director boona cheema, a co-founder of Save the Safety Net, stood out from the other presenters by not wearing black. She eloquently explained, "I'm wearing red, the color of blood. I don't ever want any of us to forget that every leader we've had in this country who has stood for something different has had to spill blood. Each time one of our children dies in the streets of Oakland or Berkeley or San Francisco, it's the color red. We want that to stop." She described the color red in the American flag, and said "the policies at the federal, state and local level will not (stop) until we take that flag back. When I pledged allegiance to that flag in 1986, I was pledging allegiance to democracy, to justice, to compassion. That flag has been taken away from us and now it stands for greed and oil and corporate wealth."

Ethel Long-Scott of the Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) declared, "We reject the death plans of Governor Terminator. We raise our voice in unity to challenge this effort to continue the war on the poor and we come together with a message of hope. We come together today not only to commemorate a fallen leader but also to celebrate and reclaim our humanity. We have a different vision, and that vision is for economic human rights. Today, as Governor Terminator tries to further cripple that already shredded safety net and get more billions of dollars in debt for the rest of us, we at WEAP call for, as Dr. King fought for, a new vision of a society that redeems our soul. A vision based on the absolute elimination of poverty."

Before and after the formal conference, people gathered outside around tables, which had signs saying: "The governor wants us to survive on a crumby diet." The signs were accompanied by trays of crumbly bread and cups of water.

Clients of St. Mary's expressed their opinions on the threatened cuts. Joe Batiste said with urgency, "We're already poor. Take away anything more, we can't make it like that. We down at the bottom of the barrel now. We don't have nothing left." William W., age 66, was homeless and sleeping under bridges until St. Mary's helped him get housing. He is worried about cuts in home care and Medi-Cal. "Senior citizens gonna have a hard time," he said. Ken added, "It's a crying shame and the government needs to be ashamed of themselves."

Mae Browning is a longtime member at St. Mary's. "I worked with IHSS taking care of the disabled and the ill for 19 years, along with my regular nursing career of 39 years," she said. "And now I have become disabled and I need IHSS. Now it seems like I'm going to be cut off. I just don't understand it."

The Martin Luther King day events in Oakland and other cities were the first steps in forming the Save the Safety Net Coalition. The main focus was on getting the press to pay attention to the services the governor wants to cut. The primary issues of concern at St. Mary's were cuts in health care, education and services for seniors. Other coalition members brought up concerns about support for food programs and issues of immigrant rights.

This was only the beginning. Gathering together the large number of organizations serving a diverse population with a variety of needs is a huge project. Planning and carrying out actions that will mobilize the public to demand that our leaders act with compassion — and ultimately, with good economic sense — will be hard.

But, as the participants at the St. Mary's conference loudly agreed: "We Are Dissatisfied." We are determined that our state government will be about the people of California, not the corporations.

Setback for Real Estate Lobby in Oakland

from page two

no evidence presented to show that a real problem actually exists with the existing law. The staff report before the commissioners stated that landlords and tenants alike were frustrated with Oakland's present laws restricting condo-conversions; but, in reality, not even one renter appeared that evening before the commissioners to request that deregulation of the existing ordinance should take place.

In response to community concerns and the lack of information provided by the staff report and by Oakland Housing Director Roy Schweyer, Planning Commission Vice Chair Michael Lighty said, "The problem has not been defined, and it is not clear what the problem is or what the solution is." Commissioner Mark McClure quickly followed with a motion to send the staff report to a Special Projects Committee for revision and clarification.

Jackie Campbell, the Housing and Community Development program manager, prepared the staff report for the proposed deregulation. On January 9, Campbell stated that it may not reach the Special Projects Committee until February 9 or later. According to Campbell, the proposed amendment and new staff report will not be sent back to the Planning Commission for another vote until some time in March.

Despite the fact that Steve Edrington of the Rental Housing Association was the only public speaker appearing at the Planning Commission to support the amendment that landlords would use to get around Measure EE and rent control, Jackie Campbell stated, "I am not aware of any involvement by the landlords to push for the deregulation of Oakland's condo-conversion ordinance as a means to get around existing renter protections." Yet, interestingly, Campbell had a front-row seat at the January 7th Planning Commission meeting when Edrington, lobbying on behalf of the landlords, urged commissioners to pass the amendment.

Despite the disingenuous claims offered by city officials, this was not a movement of renters at the Planning Commission to demand that tenant protections be stripped from them so that profiteers can convert their rental housing into expensive condos they cannot afford to buy.

In addition, it is very clear that the proposal is one-sided, with all the power being handed over to the landlords. There is no provision stating that condo-conversion should be a voluntary agreement between landlords and tenants, or that no conversion may take place without the consent of the renters, who are about to lose both their rights and rental housing.

During a number of debates shortly before the voters ushered in Measure EE, landlords threatened to convert rental housing units into condominiums if the voters dared to pass Measure EE into law.

THE SALES PITCH

No matter how much deceit and lies corrupt officials rely upon to convince the renters that the proposed deregulation is not an assault on rent control and Measure EE, the fact remains that this attempt to usurp the rights of renters is being totally backed by the realtors and landlords that stand to profit by passage of the proposal.

Mayor Jerry Brown is already trying to sell this turkey to the voters by claiming that Oakland is actually promoting homeownership, and that it is as American as apple pie. In reality, the harder the mayor tries to force thousands of renters out of their housing in the name of promoting homeownership, the more preposterous this duplicitous scheme becomes.

Among the many groups and speakers that denounced the plan to deregulate Oakland's condo-conversion laws, James Vann of the OTU stated that a recent survey reveals that the average cost of a condo below MacArthur Boulevard goes for around $294,000, and that most renters cannot afford to buy them. Vann went on to say that 25 percent of Oakland's condominiums were being rented out to tenants who have lost access to the rent control program and eviction protections as a result. Roy Schweyer later countered by stating that he has not seen any evidence of this. Phillip Neville of the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) stated that a number of the OHA's Section 8 tenants already rent condominiums in the lower hills of Oakland.

Recent statistics show that, on average, it is much more expensive to rent a condo than it is to rent an apartment in Oakland. Minimum rental costs for a studio apartment are around $625 per month, compared to around $850 per month to rent a studio condo. Renters end up paying much more when renting condos, while simultaneously losing eviction protections and access to the rent control program to oppose unfair rent increases.

NO SAFETY STANDARDS

Try to imagine a scheme so tempting as to invite every sleazy slumlord of Oakland into trying to lure in a sucker from out of town or out of state to pay $300,000 for a slum-like apartment that was converted into a condo — but the landlord was not required to have had seismic upgrades or retrofitting done for safety reasons before the buyer invested their life savings to purchase the rat trap!

That is exactly what is being proposed. The only safety standard requirements listed in the proposed amendment brought before the Planning Commission are as follows: smoke alarms must be installed at the properties being sold, along with an outdoor key box for the Fire Department to gain entry into the buildings, some illuminated exit signs in the hallways, and unit and identification postings.

There was nothing in the proposal to require landlords to upgrade for seismic safety conditions, even though the Hayward fault runs directly through Oakland. This omission did not escape the attention of the Planning Commissioners; they expressed alarm at the shortcomings of the proposal.

GRIM HOUSING CONDITIONS

Since 1991, only around 3,900 new residential units have been built in Oakland. As a result, Oakland has a chronic housing shortage and now has the fourth-highest rents in the nation. The average Oakland household income in the flatlands is $29,000 to $33,000, and a third of the renters spend more than half of their income on rent.

These grim conditions forced Oakland voters to take action by passing Measure EE in November 2002 to defend themselves from high rents and unfair evictions occurring across the city.

Rents in Oakland rose 8 percent from 1996 through 1997, and more than 30 percent from 1998 through 1999. The landlords then followed through with total war on the renters by instituting the eviction-for-profit system which displaced thousands of low-income renters in an effort to replace them with higher-income renters. The effects of the mass expulsions are still seen today in the rise of homelessness in Alameda County.

From September 1998 through December 1999, 30-day, no-cause evictions rose by 300 percent; while 56 percent of those displaced were families with children, and 75 percent of those evicted were people of color. At that point, most renters being evicted earned less than $25,000 per year and paid between $600 to $700 in rent per month in Oakland.

Anti-eviction activists urge voters and renters to call their Oakland City Councilmembers to demand that Measure EE be preserved, and that the plan to deregulate Oakland's condo-conversion laws be buried for good.

For updates and more information, contact Just Cause Oakland: (510) 763-5877.

Alameda Point Collaborative

from page 11

negotiation and Alternatives to Violence could be funded at Alameda Point.

Some saw the opportunity for Alameda to again be the resort it had once been where people came for health and relaxation, and to which artists were attracted, claiming the air was more pure than in overbuilt and impacted cities and where the light refracted on the water provided a clarity for artists rarely found.

SPACE IS PRECIOUS ON AN ISLAND

The possibilities seemed endless. The land is very special, because Alameda is an island only four miles wide and seven miles long, so space is very precious. Perhaps the land will serve surrounding cities in some way as a place to visit.

Maybe, instead of living on Alameda Point, people will live on or visit big hotel-type ships docked alongside and "Cruise in Place," with each ship as its own little city. Could Alameda Point be a no-car zone, an area of bicycles and a type of hop-on, hop-off, free-form transportation continuously circling all the facilities?

Having been an art teacher and seeing what even 4th and 5th graders came up with when asked to design cities of the future and utopian communities, I am imagining (like other longtime residents of Alameda) what will happen to our city.

The Naval Air Station had been created by landfill, with a view of San Francisco's high-rises, on Alameda's bay shore and in its marshlands. An entire private mountain had been bought with all its wildlife habitat, native flowers, and earth, brought and dumped in the bay, to be covered with airplane hangers, cement landing fields, commissaries, base housing.

The base was a little military city with its own social structure of officers, warrant officers and enlisted men. It provided facilities, activities and clubs for each group, segregating by rank, with one swimming pool for officers, and a different one for families of enlisted men. A child-care nursery, bowling alley, and movie theater were used by all (the enlisted sat in one area of the theater, the officers in another).

Military families had a commissary, grocery and gas station where they could buy at discount-to-military prices. Their lives were subsidized by the taxpayers.

Merchants in the city gave military discounts too. Rent in some of the military housing was fixed at $80 a month for the years I lived there in two- and three-bedroom project houses. Maintenance of yards, plumbing, roofing, painting, house repairs, etc., were taken care of by the military housing.

Security was provided by Military Police. People serving their quota of years in the military would be supported for life in their retirement with medical benefits and many services at taxpayers' expense.

How could the people of Alameda provide benefits and fulfill a mandate to turn swords into plowshares or offer services to a new low-income population after the government marked Alameda Naval Air Station for closing? What could be offered here to compare with what the government had financed and provided in the past, and be made ready for a civilian population with diverse, urgent needs?

URGENT NEED FOR HOUSING

Many people especially needed housing in the area, and urgently. How could Alameda become best involved in facing the growing economic crisis in cities all around where people were already showing their lives of desperation, living in cars, in shelters, under bushes, and totally without privacy in public view on benches, doorways and sidewalks?

More than eight million Californians live with the threat of hunger every day, including the "working poor." In cities around the nation, requests for emergency food supplies in 2003 rose 17 percent on average, and requests for emergency shelter rose 13 percent, according to a report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Those figures are expected to rise again.

As the need has increased, the hungry are turned away in more than half the cities studied. People remain homeless five months or more, on average, and 41 percent of the homeless are families with children. An estimated $34 million in federal food stamps is needed. On a state level, California's new governor plans to cut funding for programs for the disabled.

The Alameda Point Collaborative was formed as part of the base closure process, and the land has not been legally transferred to the city. But an intrinsic part of the transfer was that a plan for base use had to be instigated and a time element was given. The Alameda Point Collaborative has done its part in planning for base conversion, but the purposes and uses for the rest of the land are still in debate.

The Alameda Point Collaborative has created a showcase. Now they look at what they have achieved, then compare it with what is happening, or not happening, on the rest of the land; and also think about how future directives can affect or complement their own purposes. What will the influx of new residents offer the city? What will be the effects of having more cars, houses, people, garbage, electrical and other needed services?

Progress in the development of other Alameda Point areas as determined by the citizens and leaders of the City of Alameda include the following: a Least Tern bird sanctuary, teenagers bonded together in making a skate park, city use of a building as a West End City Hall, and public bus service every half hour. Also, a movie theater has been renovated, and a war memorial museum has been made from a former military transport, the USS Hornet, docked in the bay.

The former Officers Club is used for community events, such as the Chamber of Commerce Awards banquets (until the number of people attending grew so large that another facility had to be found). There is a plan to rename the former Officers Club as the Al H. DeWitt Civic Center, after Alameda's first African-American City Councilman, who also served as Vice-Mayor, and Acting Mayor. De Witt died from cancer in July 2003.

Housing is in the process of being constructed for people of various income levels, which means a school will have to be built and is in the planning stages.

After first being conceived in 1994 and becoming more fully operative since 1996, the Alameda Point Collaborative has been in the vanguard of serving the urgent needs of formerly under-served people. Certainly nothing else in the planning stages for Alameda Point equals the already functioning Alameda Point Collaborative, with its Community Garden, Head Start program located in new facilities which Ed Dankworth and others steered into completion, and a warehouse and office designated for a Food Bank and for the Alameda Chapter of the Red Cross. To have Red Cross activities always evident is appropriate to this location, since those who live in the housing and shelter at the Collaborative can see how the Red Cross provides for people in need all over the world, and learn more about the process of helping others.

SAFE REFUGE FOR FAMILIES

The Midway Shelter is a vital component of the Alameda Point Collaborative. It is a transition-stage living area for families, in an area of more permanent housing lived in by women and children who had suffered abuse and who are showing that, in the success of this design for living, they are able to transform their lives.

Midway Shelter was designed by groups who came together with prior experience in housing and programs for women in crisis, especially women attempting to escape from abusive situations, or where their children were exposed to or suffered violence.

"Building Futures with Women & Children" is a vital component of the Alameda Point Collaborative. This group has established not only the Midway Shelter, but also the Bessie Coleman Court, a transitional and permanent housing program for women who are survivors of domestic violence, and their children.

In the success of this design for living, women are showing that they are able to transform their lives. (For more information on Building Futures with Women & Children, see their website: www.bfwc.org. This group also maintains a Crisis Line: 866-A-WAY-OUT. Their executive director is Elaine de Coligny.)

The Alameda Point Collaborative currently provides homes, support services, job training, children's activities and other programs for 500 adults and children. It is a comprehensive approach to community development for specific groups of people, including the formerly homeless, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, and persons with physical or psychiatric disabilities.

A Career Center offers job search and resume tools, employment and on-the-job training. The Workforce Investment Act Program is available for youth between the ages of 16 and 21 for tutoring, study skills, drop-out prevention, leadership development, and other services.

Future plans include making a retail plant nursery which will be self-supporting and offer training and paid jobs to teenagers. Also, space will be rented to other nonprofit tenants; several nonprofits are already there, including Kids Take The Stage for theater and speech training.

COMMUNITY ART CENTER

High on the list of what Alameda residents feel is essential, is a community performing arts center and visual arts center, with an outdoor sculpture garden and other kinds of beautification. The theater will hold lectures and other educational programs as well.

For the people of the Alameda Point Collaborative who have already benefited from the opportunity to develop their expressiveness, the arts are now much appreciated. That the arts are essential to human development and well-being, and that painting, drama therapy, creative writing, and other forms of creativity can heal, inform and inspire, is backed by scientific studies funded by NASA.

While the Alameda Point Collaborative has a meeting hall bright with a mural, no place is large enough for programs for the community to enjoy together; and there is a vital need for a place of assembly of adequate size for cultural activity and idea exchange and educational programs.

Thanks to the confidence gained through their experiences living in the Alameda Point Collaborative, many of the people there now have the courage to reach out to work with others in Alameda and to help make this a reality.

That an art center can be built by the Alameda Point Collaborative for the entire city to enjoy on the site of cleaned-up debris from a burned-out shell of a building — again, a symbol of Phoenix-like rebirth, recovery, and renewal — does not seem impossible. This vision surely does not seem impossible to people who, individually and collectively, have restored their minds and bodies to fuller capacity for health and happiness.

The Alameda Point Collaborative can be reached at 677 West Ranger Ave, Alameda, CA, 94501, or by phone: (510) 898-7800. The executive director is John N. Shepherd. People with skills who want to volunteer at the Alameda Point Collaborative are welcomed.

A Mad Prison System

from page 14

housing and mistreating a huge number of mentally ill people — and many people are unaware of its ramifications."

Prison policies add to the problem by "traumatizing formerly 'normal' prisoners and making them angry, violent, and vulnerable to severe emotional problems."

Dr. Kupers, a psychiatrist and professor at the Wright Institute of Psychology in Berkeley, is a longtime advocate for the humane treatment of prisoners, and has testified as an expert witness on behalf of prisoners in more than a dozen class action lawsuits. "The deinstitutionalization of the public mental health system, combined with changes in the law that make it far less likely that a defendant's mental illness will be considered a mitigating factor when sentences are being decided, has put an unprecedented number of Americans with major psychiatric problems in the criminal justice system," Kupers wrote.

According to the HRW report, funding cutbacks threaten needed changes just when prison officials are being forced to institute reforms. "Litigation or the threat of it," the report argues, "is the prerequisite for systematic improvements in mental health services." Improvements in conditions in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin have come about as a result of class action lawsuits.

While litigation has been successful, with numerous consent decrees in place to mandate improved mental health services, still HRW finds "some correctional authorities resist putting reforms in place" because of "institutional inertia, bureaucratic obstacles, failure to understand the importance of adequate mental health services, or the lack of funding."

The HRW authors found that "many individual prison systems indicated they were unable to calculate the portion of their medical budgets devoted to mental health services." Mental health treatment, medications, and additional correctional staff for inmate supervision do not come cheap. Providing for these services is often imperiled by state budge cuts. For example, Michigan, a state praised by HRW for "dramatic improvements" in correctional mental health services, cut $5 million of its $72 million budget and reduced 50 mental health positions in 2002.

"No set of changes limited to jail and prison mental health programs will fix the larger problem," Dr. Kupers told me in a phone conversation. "Of course it would help to double or triple the number of psychiatric hospital beds within the prisons, or to expand diversion programs, but that would not alter the fact that with the widening gap between rich and poor a whole lot of people suffering from mental illness are disappeared into our jails and prisons."

The Human Rights Watch report gives witness to one of the costs of dismantling the social safety net in state after state and community after community. Mentally disabled prisoners are human beings, and "we have a social responsibility to do something about their pain and suffering."

To see the Human Rights Watch report, "Ill-Equipped: U.S. Prisons and Offenders with Mental Illness," go to their website: www.hrw.org/press/2003/10/us102203.htm.

The Two Americas Are Moving Further Apart

Wal-Mart heirs own a combined $102.5 billion in wealth, while Wal-Mart workers, most without health benefits, are among America's poorest.

by Holly Sklar



"Vogue and Vagrant." Painting by Christine Hanlon. **Poor women sleep on the sidewalk outside a high-priced clothing store.**

If poor Americans were a nation, the population of poverty would top the combined populations of Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming and the District of Columbia.

That's using the Census Bureau's low-ball poverty count of 35 million Americans.

If the Forbes 400 richest Americans were a nation, they could celebrate New Year's together in a hotel ballroom. Don't look for "The Simple Life" rich kids Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. Their families don't come close to making the list.

The Forbes 400 combined wealth of $955 billion is greater than the gross domestic product of Canada, the world's eighth-richest economy.

The wealth threshold for admission to the Forbes 400 is $600 million. The Hilton family fortune, an estimated $360 million, is small by comparison.

The poverty thresholds for 2002 were $8,628 for a person 65 and older, $9,359 for a person under 65, $12,400 for an adult and child, $14,480 for a couple with one child, and $18,244 for a couple with two children. $18,244 isn't enough to buy the Patek Philippe gold watch and Hermes purse on the Forbes index of luxury goods.

By the official measure of poverty, a senior with just $719 a month in Social Security and other income was not poor. In reality America, many people above the poverty line can't afford housing, utilities, food, healthcare, transportation and other basic expenses, including taxes. And $719 won't get you a room for two nights at the Times Square Hilton for New Year's. It will almost buy the box of 25 cigars on the Forbes luxury index.

The two Americas are moving further apart.

The Forbes 400 combined wealth rose 10 percent over the past year. Since 1982, when Forbes began the list, Forbes 400 wealth has jumped about 450 percent, adjusting for inflation.

The poverty rate hit its best mark way back in 1973. The 2002 poverty rate of 12.1 percent was 9 percent higher than 1973's rate. The 2002 child poverty rate was 19 percent higher than its lowest point in 1969.

When the Forbes 400 began in 1982, there were 13 billionaires and 5 of them were oilman H. L. Hunt's children. Today there are 262 billionaires and 4 of them are Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton's children. Including Sam's widow Helen, the Waltons hold ranks four through eight on the Forbes 400, with $20.5 billion each.

The Waltons' combined $102.5 billion — up from $94 billion in 2002 — nearly matches the wealth of the three richest men: Microsoft cofounders Bill Gates ($46 billion) and Paul Allen ($22 billion), and megainvestor Warren Buffett ($36 billion).

The Waltons' $8.5 billion wealth gain in the past year is more than the total budget for Head Start, serving nearly 1 million children.

While the Wal-Mart heirs are among America's richest, Wal-Mart workers are among America's poorest.

Wal-Mart's U.S. workers — most without health benefits — average just $8 an hour, compared with $12 in retail trade generally. Wal-Mart's average wage is lower than the 1968 minimum wage of $8.51, adjusted for inflation. Now the world's largest company, Wal-Mart is rolling back wages in the growing areas it dominates from America to China.

Wal-Mart's CEO pay, by contrast, rose 1,767 percent between 1995 and 2003, according to compensation expert Graef Crystal. CEO Lee Scott's 2003 pay package of $29.8 million amounts to more than $3,400 for every hour of every day of the year.

Thanks in part to poverty-level wages, hunger and homelessness are up sharply, according to the new U.S. Conference of Mayors survey. Emergency food requests jumped an average 17 percent over the past year and emergency shelter requests rose 13 percent in the 25 cities surveyed.

Among those requesting food assistance, 59 percent were families with children, and 39 percent of adults were employed. Among the homeless, 40 percent are families with children, 17 percent are employed and 10 percent are veterans.

Emergency food and shelter providers turn people away because they cannot cope with the rising demand.

Let's make a national New Year's resolution: raise the low wages that contribute to hunger, homelessness and poverty in this richest nation on earth.

Holly Sklar is coauthor of *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All Of Us* (www.raisethefloor.org). For reprint permission contact hsklar@aol.com

My Friend Eddie

by C.R. Credit

I met Eddie recently. Eddie is homeless. He is self-employed as a community recycler in the Marina district of San Francisco. Eddie has dignity; he is not your typical beggar, or "bum." Eddie consumes no alcohol; but likes a little medicinal cannabis for its various health benefits. Eddie is 56.

When I asked Eddie if he has any children, he told me he has two children that are grown now. He didn't offer many details, and I didn't press for any, though I could feel he loved them very much, and would dearly love to do something profoundly beneficial for them. Perhaps it was the way he answered my question about what he would like, if he could have anything, and he answered, "a billion dollars." When asked, "Why so much?" he explained that "I've got a lot of kin folk."

Not long ago I spent some time with my friend Eddie. He uses a shopping cart for his recycling business. He also keeps a few personal effects in the cart — something to eat, something to drink, a bedroll — you know; the same kind of stuff you or I would carry, if we were in Eddie's shoes.

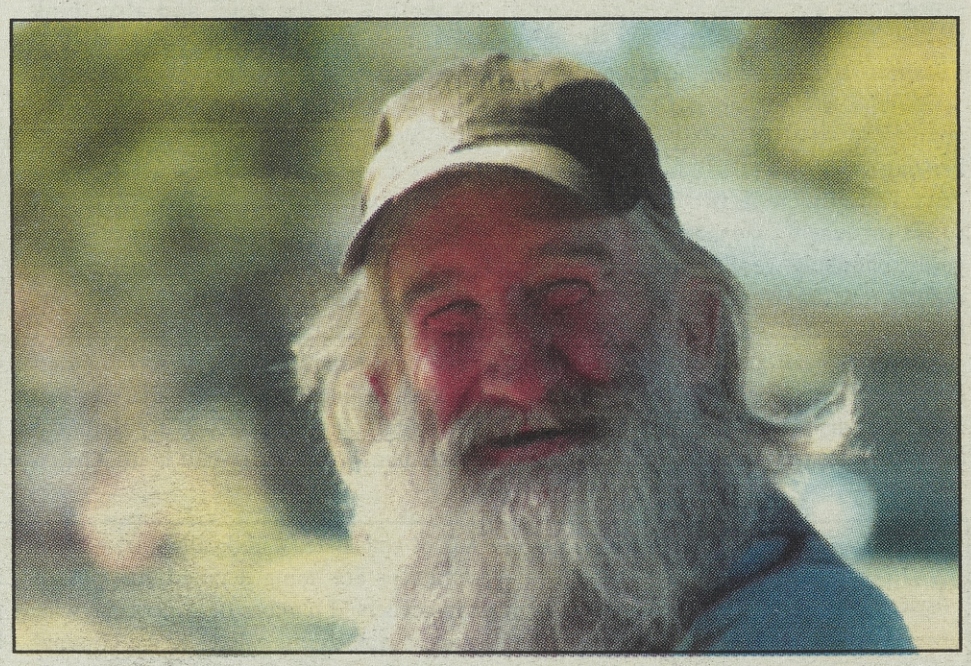
As I walked and talked with Eddie; I made mention of the appearance of his shopping cart. I told him some people (most) think it aesthetically unpleasing, and that an attractive piece of fabric covering it would be nice; and that the neighbors would probably appreciate it. Eddie took offense at this notion; explaining that he liked the way it looked; it is part of his persona. I learned something from Eddie that day, and so did Eddie. There is nothing wrong with caring about what people think... is there?

Eddie is an American, and he has good, healthy, American values, such as the work ethic. He desires prosperity, liberty and freedom, and also wants to spend those good, hard-earned, American greenbacks.

There really are only minor differences between Eddie and others. Being a misfit doesn't qualify him as particularly different, for there are many misfits who don't fit in well with the "capitalistic scene," if you know what I mean. The difference is that Eddie is homeless. Eddie has no place to lay his bags down and call it home — not a room, a shack, or even a van.

The lyrics of a fallen American hero probably sum it up best. John Lennon's "Imagine": "No need for greed or hunger/ a brotherhood of man./ Imagine all the people sharing all the world..."

Imagine a dignity-filled American patriot, a contributing member of our community, now homeless. Where is our conscience? Where is our concern? Where is our shame? What are we going to do, and when? Can it truly be done, once and for all? Can we as Americans, loving to be called "leaders of the free world," go forth and truly be instrumental in ending this kind of suffering on a worldwide scale?



C.R. Credit writes: "This is a friend of mine named Gordon. He is transient and homeless. One more of the many and often friendly faces of the downtrodden."

The truth is that the welfare of the individual is intricately entwined in the welfare of the species. Thankfully, our consciences won't allow otherwise.

Imagine attractive little dorms, if you will, built unobtrusively in various areas, with individual showers, a toilet, a place to prepare food. These housing units could be owned and maintained by the city, county, state, or federal government — perhaps a joint investment venture of these governing bodies. The homeless don't care so much about "ownership" per se, but more about "usership."

Perhaps we all have things we could learn, and benefit from, by getting to know the homeless. After all, aren't we all here temporarily? Aren't we all without a permanent home as mortal human beings on planet earth?

Try and get to know some of the homeless people in your neighborhood. You may discover they are not so bad after all. In fact, you may get to genuinely like, even respect them, and even care about them enough to speak out in their behalf.